

# YOUNG MALCOLM


*by* GEORGE BLAKE



Emma A. Keeler  
from Aunty Koff

18 39

1930  
Birth Day Greetings



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*YOUNG MALCOLM*



# YOUNG MALCOLM

BY

GEORGE BLAKE

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*"Mince Collop Close," "The Wild Men," etc.*



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**YOUNG MALCOLM**  
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**TO MY MOTHER**





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## *CHAPTER I*

### I

THE Chairman glided easily towards the inevitable peroration.

“ . . . But now, ladies and gentlemen, you have not come here to listen to me, but to our good friend the Professor; so without further ado I will call on our lecturer to-night to tell us all about the marvels of the mighty deep.”

Chairmen came and went, but the “introductory remarks” were always the same at the Friday evening lectures of the Philosophical Society. The round of polite applause, greeting the jaunty advance of the lecturer, was ever of the same degree of moderate friendliness. The audiences, week after week, were the same: the same spinsters, the same old gentlemen with critical eyebrows and hands cupped round deaf ears, the same fidgeting schoolboys in the front row. The pictures which adorned the walls of the lecture-room looked down from angles unaltered in thirty years. Each hebdomadal meeting was precisely like any other

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of the series; and if one lecture concerned the Marvels of the Mighty Deep, another the Cathedral Cities of England, and another the Women in Dickens's Novels, it really did not make much difference to the faithful audience. These philosophers sought distraction in general rather than instruction in particular. In a Scottish provincial town you would cheerfully attend a lecture on Heresy in Islam. Anything out of the drab ordinary of that life is not to be missed.

Philosophical, the Society called itself with fine Victorian gravity, but its functions were recreative. You might say that there was but one anxious and brooding spirit present at each weekly meeting. For Mr. Tweedie alone—Mr. Tom Tweedie, "who presided with acceptance over the magic lantern," as the *Courier* observed in its Saturday issues—the lectures were harassing affairs. You could see it in the haggard, sallow face of the man, lit up ghoulishly by the glow from the arcs of his lantern, in the droop of his moustache, in the working of the Adam's apple in his long and skinny throat. Sensitive people went far to avoid a seat near the lantern at the back of the hall, so troubled was the aura about the lanternist, so painful to behold were the manifestations of his anxiety.

Mr. Tweedie, however, was not altogether alone in his agony. There were those philosophers who sympathised excessively and in particular with a



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small boy, a pale-faced lad of fourteen, who occupied a semi-official position as assistant to the anxious lanternist, his father. Good women brooded on the pathetic attraction of that young, white face; "such a serious wee fellow," they said, marking the eager, craning lift of his eyes towards the pictures on the screen. Their pity was wasted. If young Malcolm Tweedie was pathetically eager, if he fumbled anxiously among the slides in the box and was often shaken by the angry hand of a nervous father, it was because he, almost alone among the four hundred philosophers, found in the facile expositions of the lecturers and in the silvery pictures on the screen the delight of his soul.

At first it had been Malcolm's privilege to be with his father at those Friday evening lectures in the Garth Hall: a special treat for a good boy. Thereafter it had become his duty to assist a painstaking parent in the highly technical business of presiding over the magic lantern. And never did duty afford such pleasure to the conscript.

An intelligent boy: young Malcolm Tweedie was certainly that. Facts entranced him, and he absorbed them with an avidity that the resources of an elementary education could not satisfy. To assist his father; to hand out the slides in proper order and be handy with a fresh carbon when one burnt out—these were the fees he willingly paid for the joys of instruction. Friday night after Friday night he sat there beside the lantern and,

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nearly bursting with the ecstasy of acquisition, absorbed a vast number of unrelated but interesting pieces of information.

It did not matter in the least what they lectured about. The Cathedral Cities of England; Readings from the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray; the Evolution of the Turbine; People and Places of Turkestan; The Rings of Saturn—Malcolm drank it up thirstily and uncritically. There he sat in the darkness, eager, nervous, receptive, his anxious eyes on the lighted screen. Always he was vaguely aware of contact with a vast world which he had yet to explore. It thrilled him to think of the sheeted treasures in the museum behind the lecture-room. There was not a lecture but reminded him of some exhibit and unveiled to him the mystery of its relationship to the vast, fascinating abstraction that possessed his eager mind—General Knowledge.

The popular lecturer is not the purest type of scholar. He is apt to generalise, to take short cuts, to compromise with expediency. So much he admits to himself and pockets his fees. Does he ever think of the fallow, sensitive minds into which, casually, he drops the seed of the poisonous tree of knowledge? Does he ever reckon his responsibilities, not to the spinsters and the old men, but to ambitious youth?

It hurt young Malcolm Tweedie when the lights

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were switched on again and the chairman rose once more.

" . . . And with the name of the Professor, I would like to couple that of our old friend, Mr. Tweedie. What the Society would do without him and his lantern I do not know."

A round of hurried clapping; then the shuffle of a polite audience dispersing. Snatches of strictly domestic conversation. Then the lanternist and the boy were left in the quiet company of Mr. Peat, the curator, and the immemorial pictures. As often as not young Malcolm snatched a minute from the task of packing up to walk round and study the gilded labels on the masterpieces.

### II

Father and son walked home through the night, the boy hurrying and chattering at the side of his tall parent. They went eastwards. At Nelson Street they crossed the invisible frontier between West End and East End—a boundary marked with rigid clarity in provincial towns. Through the sulphurous fumes from the tunnel at the West Station they passed, across the windy triangle of Blackhall Square, and so into the cañon made by the tenements bordering Mountjoy Street, which runs down steeply from the heights above the town.

There was a moon in the sky, but clouds passed across its face at the bidding of a sou'-westerly

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wind that carried with it scuds of the eternal drizzle of the West Coast. Father and son did not notice that smirr of rain, which might have been disconcerting to a southron. They were used to it. And the boy was full of the marvels he had seen and heard about in the Garth Hall. He plied his father with questions which that good man was hard put to it to answer.

Mr. Tom Tweedie was a lanternist in his spare hours only. It was his hobby. Beginning as a photographer in the earnest fashion of the 'nineties, he had graduated to this higher pursuit, and had found that it could be made to pay. The discovery was accidental. The town had to have a lanternist, and Tom Tweedie knew how to work lanterns. No doubt it was all in the Almighty's mysterious design. At all events, Tom Tweedie listened three times a week to lectures covering the range of human knowledge.

If he did not acquire from that experience an infallible omniscience, his lantern was to be blamed. It occupied most of his attention during these evening hours. For the rest of the day he had his own job to do. Over a dark shop in Holm Street ran the legend—"Thomas Tweedie, Plumber, Gasfitter and Bellhanger." It is indeed a fact that nobody had ever seen Mr. Tweedie in the act of hanging bells. The term was a survival from the Age before Electricity. But he had a decent little business in

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the repairing of lead pipes and the installation of water closets in his own part of the town.

His house was typically that of the respectable working man who has achieved the ownership of a small business. On the third floor of a Scots tenement building of standardised pattern, approached up a stair lit pallidly by a quivering incandescent burner on each landing, it consisted of three rooms—two rooms and kitchen, to be precise, with a dark bathroom abutting on the landing outside. Three rooms; and the greatest of these was the kitchen. The genius of the lower orders in Scotland runs to kitchens. Of the best room, the parlour, they seem to be afraid as of an alien social manifestation. They make of it a sort of mausoleum, with wax flowers, a stiff sideboard, and photographs of the deceased on the cluttered mantelpiece. Seldom used, rarely aired, such a room reeks with the odour of a moribund sanctity.

But in the kitchen the decent working man and his wife are at home, happy. Mrs. Tweedie's kitchen, for instance, was bright and homely as her parlour was dull and inhospitable. In the kitchen blazed a hearty fire whose dancing flames were reflected from polished covers and clean, bright plates on the dresser. The cretonne curtains that sheltered the privacy of the kitchen bed were sweet and tidy. The deal table was white like bleached moss.

Mrs. Tweedie had a comfortable rocking chair



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drawn up before the gleaming fender. Her broad, kind face beamed welcome to her husband and her son.

"Well, Tam. Well, Malcolm. Was it a good lecture?"

"Oh, rare, mother!" It was young Malcolm's one appreciative epithet. "Rare! All about crustaceans and the lammellibranchiata."

"Lammelli—what, boy? Your wee head'll burst, sonny."

"They were a pretty tricky set o' slides, I can tell ye," said Mr. Tweedie, unlacing his boots. "Who's that?"

The front door bell had jangled violently.

"That'll be Lizzie," said Mrs. Tweedie. "I was half expecting her."

"Oh, Lizzie!" grumbled Mr. Tweedie. He did not altogether approve of his own sister, especially at half-past ten in the evening.

"Hoots, Tam!" exclaimed Mrs. Tweedie tolerantly and bustled out.

She returned immediately with Mrs. Macroy, a severe lady of sixty or thereabouts. Mrs. Macroy was in black. Her elaborate hat was askew over her forehead, and from beneath it there strayed wisps of her thin hair. A white handkerchief was crushed in her right hand. She brought with her a gust of night air and an aura of suffering.

"Whose deathbed have you been at the night?"

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asked Mr. Tweedie sourly. He was tired, and he knew his sister Lizzie.

"I've just come from poor Aggie Thomson. Oh, but she's in a bad way!" Mrs. Macroy did not let the preliminaries of intercourse stand between her and melodrama. She rolled her eyes to indicate distress and shook a mournful head. "Gallstones, poor soul. As yellow as a duck's foot. They would operate, but she'll no' have chloroform. 'Lizzie,' she says to me, 'do you think I'm vera bad?' And I just says to her, 'Aggie, lass,' I says, 'while there's life there's hope.' What else could I say? Gallstones. As yellow as a duck's foot! O, Tam, if ye only seen the colour of her!"

Mrs. Macroy was on her hobbyhorse. She specialized in suffering and death, deriving from these spectacles a dark but abiding satisfaction. A widow, it seemed that for her life held nothing more interesting, gratifying, exciting, than the end of it. It was Mr. Tweedie's grim joke that Lizzie, his sister, would walk twenty miles to hear the death rattle in the throat of a tinker.

So marked, at all events, was the morbid tendency in his Aunt Lizzie that young Malcolm had come to regard her visits as heaven-sent opportunities for the free indulgence of his own tastes. While she held the field with a detailed account of a deathbed scene, he was free to read unobserved. His elders forgot him; in his reading Malcolm forgot the world.

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He had that capacity for intense concentration. His appetite for information could not be frustrated by the claims of sociability. There was little enough to read in the house, to be sure. Mrs. Tweedie subscribed to the *People's Friend*, but the insistence of that excellent journal on romance rather than on fact repelled the boy. The local newspaper was but a daily appetizer to his hunger for enlightenment. Malcolm relied almost entirely on two works—a treatise on “English Literature” by one, Dr. Morrell, and an ancient edition of Chambers’s Encyclopædia, picked up by Mr. Tweedie in an acquisitive mood at a sale of some unfortunate’s furniture and plenishing.

The “English Literature” Malcolm knew nearly by heart. He could read it with pleasure when all else failed, as pious folks turn to the Bible, as the middle-aged retire from life’s stresses on the Pickwick Papers. The Encyclopædia he held in greater awe. He doled out its riches to himself, for he could not bring himself to squander that fine, confused wealth by reading straight through. It was for him strictly a work of reference to be enjoyed as the proper occasion arose.

So now, while Aunt Lizzie mourned, he slipped to the corner where the volumes were shelved, retired with one to the table, and silently, stealthily, set himself down to study the problems associated with the crustaceans. The conversation by the

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fireside died out of his consciousness as he slipped into the privy chamber of his rapt concentration.

They had not ceased talking when he came to the end of that fascinating chapter, but he could not risk interruption and remonstrance by moving to the shelves for the volume containing *Pelecypoda*, to which his reading had referred him. He turned, therefore, to an illuminating article on the late Lord Clive.

He was only halfway through that when he heard his mother's voice addressing him:

"Malcolm, its time wee boys was in their bed."

Admitting a fair defeat, he obeyed the order implicit in that gentle warning.

### III

Hopefully retailing the news that her old friend Mrs. Laurie had been smitten with a stroke that might have fatal complications, Aunt Lizzie took her departure, and Mr. and Mrs. Tweedie were left in possession of their own fireside.

"Well, Tam," said Mrs. Tweedie, settling herself slowly in the rocking chair. She was beginning to be aware of a stiffness in the joints.

"Well, Nance," said Mr. Tweedie.

It was a complete exchange of understanding and love. Mrs. Tweedie picked up the *Courier*. From a pocket Mr. Tweedie took a dark and elaborately mounted pipe, removed a cork that immured the

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contents of the bowl, and pressed down the ash with a slow forefinger. On the hearth he found a scrap of paper. This he folded with care till he had a spill that suited his grave fancy in these matters. Nearly five minutes passed before the actual lighting of the pipe was begun. Then he spoke between puffs.

"I've been thinkin', Nance—*puff*—I've been thinkin'——"

"Yes, Tam. What is it? You mean Malcolm?"

"—*Puff*—that that wee boy might be . . . *Puff—Puff*. . . ."

"Yes, Tam. What is it? You mean Malcolm?"

"That wee boy . . ."

He referred to Malcolm, of course, always affectionately "the wee boy" in that house. Malcolm was a late blossom of their union.

"I was saying," resumed Mr. Tweedie, now master of his pipe, "that Malcolm might do with a term or two at the Academy, seeing he's shaping so well."

"Oh Tam!"

Mrs. Tweedie dropped the paper and gazed at her husband ecstatically, her face beaming. It was the realisation of one of her dreams. The Academy was superior; you paid fees and mixed with the West End. Malcolm had hitherto enjoyed the excellent but gratuitous resources of the Higher Grade. It dwelt in Mrs. Tweedie's simple mind that the payment of fees guaranteed a superior education and grander opportunities.



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"Oh Tam," she cried. "That would be fine! Can we manage it, think you?"

"I was thinkin' we might," answered Mr. Tweedie gravely. "Things have been not so bad this last year. That wee bit contract at Ingleston. . . . Not so bad, mind ye."

"Oh, I'd be terrible pleased if we could manage it. He's such a great wee laddie for his books."

"Aye, he sticks to them. Better than that big. . . ." Mr. Tweedie turned almost fiercely on his wife: "Where is he, Nance?"

"Who? Jock?"

"Ye ken fine I mean Jock."

"He's not in yet, Tam," said Mrs. Tweedie softly. "He'll be getting back from the night school."

"Getting back! And it a quarter-past eleven! Talk sense, woman!"

"Ye're hard on the lad, Tam. He's young yet."

"He's all that," said Mr. Tweedie cryptically. At this point he became involved in another struggle with his pipe and took to muttering between the puffs. "Quarter-past eleven—*puff*—Night school—*puff*—wish he'd learn something at the night school, for I—*puff*—can teach him nothing in the shop."

But Mrs. Tweedie had picked up her newspaper again and was content to smile at it with the quiet confidence of a happy woman. Silence fell between them. The fire whispered as the glowing walls of it subsided. The clock ticked loudly on the mantelpiece. The *Courier* crackled under the

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plump fingers of Mrs. Tweedie, and Mr. Tweedie's lips audibly enjoyed the strong tobacco. Through these homely, unnoticed sounds man and wife listened for the sound of young footsteps on the stairs outside.

It was half-past eleven before Jock came home and, smiling, faced his parents.

"Well, Jock?"

"Where have you been?"

The questions were put simultaneously, but Jock did not recoil. With a frank, open face, a shock of fair hair and slightly stupid blue eyes, he was a simple and genial hobbledehoy. That he and young Malcolm should have sprung from the same union was superficially a paradox of heredity. Malcolm's quality was manifestly intellectual, Jock's entirely physical. Each was an excellent specimen of his type.

"We had a meeting of the club," said Jock, seating himself on a deal chair by the table. He tugged at his bootlaces.

"Club! What club?" Mr. Tweedie was invariably sceptical in the matter of his elder son's enterprises.

"Are your feet wet, Jock?" asked his mother softly.

"The Football Club—the Bridgend Violet," Jock explained while the solicitous fingers of Mrs. Tweedie felt his socks.

"Bridgend Violet!" grumbled Mr. Tweedie: "Bridgend, yer-auntie-Kate!"

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He retired on his pipe, expressing in loud puffs his contempt for an enterprise so fatuous.

"You'll find a nice wee bit of potted head on the dresser, Jock," said Mrs. Tweedie.

"That's the stuff," said Jock appreciatively.

He ate it noisily and at speed, but even his father did not remonstrate, for it would have been folly to suggest that Jock's digestion could ever be upset. In any event, Mr. Tweedie had formally withdrawn from the conversation. Mrs. Tweedie whispered to her son.

"Wee Malcolm's going to the Academy."

"Good for the wee Professor!" said Jock, heartily. He pushed away his plate. "I think I'll go to my bed."

"And none too soon," came a gruff voice from the fireside.

"Huts, Tam, ye're a grumpy old thing," said Mrs. Tweedie. She removed from her mouth the dental plates that helped to present such a bright face to the world, and then spoke thickly: "It's time we were getting in, too."

Husband and wife shared the large bed which was built like a cavernous cupboard into the kitchen wall. The boys slept together in the room across the passage. There, propped up by pillows under the incandescent light, lost in Dr. Morrell's exposition of English Literature, young Malcolm was discovered by his brother.

"Hullo, Professor!" Jock greeted him with rough

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affection. "I hear you're going to the Academy to be a toff."

"I'm not!" Malcolm dropped his book.

"Oh, but you are. Me and the old man have just arranged it."

Malcolm laughed. Jock represented his ideal of a wit—and he had to laugh for excitement. The Academy! Where they had those big new laboratories! It must be true. Malcolm knew that Jock was too dull and too kind to invent the story to tease him. The Academy. . . .

He got no further with the good Morrell's account of the lamentable career of Chatterton before Jock turned out the light and climbed in beside him, with a jocular:

"Over the bed with you, Professor!"

### IV

Mr. Tom Tweedie was a man of slow mental habit. It was his fashion to stalk a decision, as it were, rather than take it in the quick, decisive way of more mercurial persons. When an idea of more than casual significance occurred to him, he stewed it in his mind for a long time, keeping it secret until he thoroughly understood its implications. The idea was then ripe for enunciation to his wife, with whom he would discuss it at intervals, it might be for weeks, before deciding that the hour for translating it into action had struck. It is just this

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integrity of ratiocination that has earned for the Scot so many of life's more substantial rewards.

In the matter of young Malcolm's higher education, however, Mr. Tweedie was stampeded, bluffed, tricked into a rapidity of action quite unusual. Mentioning the idea to his good wife that night, he had intended to convey no more than that the notion had ceased to be a mere velleity. The announcement was to his way of thinking merely a possibility of a future still distant. His grave mind did not clearly realise that he had put a very dear ambition within the grasp of his excellent Nance, and that while she was a good wife she was a still better mother. He wakened next morning to hear his partner speak of the proposition as of an act virtually accomplished.

"The Academy for Malcolm?" he said drowsily. Then he turned on his side and stared at the plump face beside him on the pillow. "Ye're terrible quick in the uptake, Nance. I just mentioned it."

"Look you here, Tam," Mrs. Tweedie's voice was firm. She had been awake, thinking of this thing, for an hour past. "You know fine wee Malcolm's going to the Academy sooner or later. And I'll just not have you havoring and dithering about it for the next twelvemonth."

"I never heard the like," said Mr. Tweedie, addressing the ceiling in blank astonishment. He had a shrewd notion that Nance was making up his

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mind for him. "Havering and dithering! Did you ever hear the like?"

And just then the boy himself came into the kitchen in his nightdress, his face eager.

"Am I going to the Academy, father? Am I going to the Academy? Jock said you said I was going."

Mr. Tweedie was suddenly moved to resist this powerful conspiracy against him.

"Will you go back to your bed, boy!" he roared. "Ye'll drive me mad wi' your Academy, Academy, Academy!"

Malcolm disappeared rapidly. Mr. Tweedie felt the bed tremble and knew with dismay that his wife was chuckling over one of those private jokes, so maddening to mankind, that the best of women entertain.

"Ye may laugh . . ." he said bitterly.

"O, Tam!" sighed Mrs. Tweedie. "Ye're a queer old man."

Mr. Tweedie grunted.

"Aye, a queer old man," she repeated affectionately. "Now just you look here, Tam. You know fine that wee Malcolm had best start at the Academy at the next term. That's three weeks from now, after the New Year holidays. Well, you'll just be a sensible man and put on your best suit and go down and see the headmaster this very day."

There was silence for a time. At length Mr. Tweedie sighed, turned over on his left side and

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away from his partner and spoke to the winter dawn.

"Oh, I suppose you'll have your way of it."

The battle was over. So complete was Mrs. Tweedie's victory that her husband did silently suffer himself to be persuaded into a frock coat of antique cut for the interview. His silk hat, survival of many a funeral in the wind-swept cemetery on the hill, was taken from its cylindrical cardboard box and brushed yet once again. Mr. Tweedie made but one protest, and that inevitable, against the stiffness of his clean-starched collar. But he did thus, at eleven of the morning, with a nearly breathless boy's hand in his, set off down the hill towards the great Gothic building in its setting of gardens and playgrounds under the spire of the West Kirk.

The headmaster, Mr. Ainslie, received them with true professional geniality—an easy assumption before a working man and his boy. Mr. Ainslie condescended; and if Mr. Tweedie did not catch the significance of the attitude, Malcolm did and made a private classification.

"I understand, Mr. Tweedie, you wish your boy to have the social as well as the educational advantages we can offer in the Academy. Quite."

"You see, sir," said Mr. Tweedie, laboriously pursuing the theme he had chosen for himself, "me and his mother, you see, had a bit of a notion we might make a doctor of him. You see . . ."



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"Quite, Mr. Tweedie. I see. A very excellent idea. He should take, I fancy, a semiclassical course. Physics, chemistry, mathematics—that goes without saying; but I confess myself prejudiced, Mr. Tweedie, in favour of a little Latinity."

"No doubt you're right, sir," said Mr. Tweedie, "but it's this way, you see. Malcolm here . . ."

Mr. Ainslie waved the merely parental interposition aside. "I think we know *exactly* what to give your boy, Mr. Tweedie."

"Botany ——" Mr. Tweedie contrived to blurt.

"I know, my dear sir, I know. *Medio tutissimus ibis*—eh, Malcolm? But now let us see how he stands in knowledge."

Mr. Ainslie's examinational methods were grandly conceived. He took all knowledge for his province. It was the examinee who guessed very quickly that the object was to impress a parent of the lower orders rather than to ascertain the intellectual resources of the child. In general knowledge, however, Mr. Ainslie found that Malcolm was not easily to be mystified. He fell back rapidly on the classics.

"A little weak in Latin, I think," he pronounced at length with satisfaction. "A little weak, yes."

"Botany——" Mr. Tweedie repeated doggedly.

"In its place, Mr. Tweedie, certainly. But I confess myself prejudiced in favour of a little Latinity. We shall start Malcolm in Senior Four. The session starts on January fifth."

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Pride was high in Malcolm as he walked away with his father from that momentous interview, but there lurked beneath that large satisfaction a secret dismay, the ghost of a fear. Mr. Ainslie had indicated clearly enough how he was to be regarded by the Academy—as something from an alien and common world. There stirred in the boy then the first twinge of a sense of social inferiority. Vaguely he realised that there hung across the path of his career the monstrous shadow of class distinction.

Suddenly he began to feel terribly sorry for his grave, hard-working father and his trustful mother, those two dear people who were making sacrifices that he might be given his chance.

## CHAPTER II

### I

THEY use on Clydeside a word which, innocuously derived, has come to bear an ugly meaning. *Gille* is the Gaelic word from which it comes: *gille*, a boy; but if you are called a keelie on Clydeside, you are grossly insulted indeed. There is no term in good English that adequately translates the word. "Cad" is ambiguous and does not hit the precise note; a keelie is definitely a cad of the lower orders. It conveys a social insult. It is a deadly term of contempt among those who have escaped from the working class into the lower-middle strata of society.

Malcolm Tweedie was called a keelie on his first day at the Academy. He did not fight the offender, for he had expected the insult. It did not hurt him individually. What hurt Malcolm was the gross outrage on his mother's pride. She must never know. There were many facts about his life at the Academy she must never know.

It is difficult to say exactly why the young gentlemen of the Academy should have felt justified in despising the son of a small plumber. They

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were, for the most part, sons of more or less prosperous men of business—men who were products of homes exactly like Malcolm's but who had prospered sufficiently to confer on the next generation a social advantage over the sons of plumbers. There is no aristocracy save that of wealth in industrial areas. The villa can sneer at the tenement, and that is all. But the distinctions are clear and fiercely contested by those who have reason to be sensitive on issues of the kind.

So Malcolm was a keelie. Not that a keelie was a phenomenon in the Academy. There were more decent workingmen in the town eager for the social advancement of their sons than the sons of richer men cared to acknowledge. And there were bursars from the elementary Board Schools. But whereas the problem of how to deal with a bursar was simple—he could be kicked—the problem presented by a keelie for whom fees were actually paid was much more complicated and difficult. The distinction helped to bring on Malcolm more attention than a keelie usually gets.

It was unpleasant at first, very unpleasant, and he was unhappy. With all his natural taste for solitariness, it hurt his boyish pride to be ignored. To have the run of those great, new laboratories—that was fine; but it was long before Malcolm was drawn naturally into the normal stream of school life. For weeks he was punctiliously ignored by the shipowner's son. He was jeered at by the

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robust as a swot and a stew. But there came a day when he broke out from his rut and made history and drew upon himself the friendly condescensions of the young gentlemen from the West End.

Rugby Football was the Academy's winter game. It is a game that good mothers like Mrs. Tweedie regard as brutal and that big Board School brothers like Jock consider a form of swank. Even Mr. Tweedie shook his head over Malcolm's announcement of his intention to play.

"You'll do whit's right at the school, Malcolm," he said gravely: "I'll not have it said that you can't be upsides with the other boys. But it's a wild, wild game, right enough."

"You'll be coming back to me in the ambulance with your leg broken," cried his mother.

"You'll be coming the haw-haw all over the shop. Swank!" said Jock contemptuously.

But Malcolm prevailed. There was in him a hard certainty of purpose that was difficult to deflect. His parents might have refused him the money for football boots and the harlequin jersey of the school. But they did not do so. Somehow they were in the habit of deferring to Malcolm when his mind was made up, as if they acknowledged the authority of the best brain in the household. Above all, they would not let him fail in the social obligations of the Academy.

And in his very first practice game Malcolm distinguished himself. He was with the riffraff in

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the scrum, of course, and he was terrified at first by the scrambling crudity of the business. But he had in him that high, fey gallantry of the sensitive; he could command that recklessness of spirit which, rising to meet the needs of a moment of crisis, men call courage. He was kicked on the shins and once, most disastrously, on the stomach, and with each assault his blood rose higher. Somebody shouted at him suddenly to lie on the ball. He lay on the ball, and then it seemed that all the furies of hell swept down to pull him off it, one batch at his feet, another at his head and shoulders, while one fierce individual kept battering at his ribs with a booted toe.

Then Malcolm found himself alone, staring at the sky. He staggered to his feet. There was a great shouting down the field. At once he became aware that a tall boy was racing towards him, his face purposeful, the ball between his hands.

"Tackle him low! Tackle him low!"

Malcolm knew that these appealing wails were addressed to himself. He moved and plunged, his eyes shut, his arms outspread.

It was as if an express train had hit him. He did not know what had happened, except that he was on the ground again in close proximity to the warm body of him who had been running with the ball. He heard shouts.

"Well tackled, sir! Oh, I say, well tackled, young Tweedie!"

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A strong hand lifted him to his feet, and his victim, whom he recognised to be the Captain of the XV, looked earnestly into his face.

"That was a dam' fine tackle, young Tweedie," he said.

For the rest of the game Malcolm's head ached sorely, but his heart beat happily. He had done it, done it! Not merely had he justified himself in the eyes of his schoolmates; he had conquered the hesitant thinker in himself.

No Side sounded, and the boys moved to the tiny club house to put on jackets and caps. As he was walking alone up the grassy slope, Malcolm heard a voice behind.

"That was a topping tackle of yours, Tweedie! And old Bill Nichol, too! You'll get your place in the second at least."

"Oh, I don't know," said Malcolm modestly.

"I bet you will. You'll see."

The two boys entered the pavilion and came out together into the gathering dusk. Malcolm's new friend looked at him half shyly and spoke casually:

"Walking up my way? I live in Garvel Street."

## II

It was Malcolm's first social triumph. To be invited in the most friendly fashion to walk home with a boy who lived in Garvel Street, and that



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boy none other than Pat Rennie, the shipbuilder's son!

Garvel Street is a thoroughfare of which any town might be proud. It is broad and straight and long, lined on two sides with fine trees. To the pedestrian it is no more than an unusually spacious corridor, for its course is marked by high parallel walls. Every two hundred yards or so, the high walls are broken by large gates of varnished pine, which give entrance to the large gardens that the high walls bound so nobly and effectively. Through these gardens wind aristocratic drives that lead to large houses, most of them in the Italianate style, lining a crest of ground above the River.

The houses date from the great days of the town's prosperity in the 'seventies and 'eighties. They were built by lords of the sugar trade and maintained in colonial style until the abolition of the Bounties finally checked and blighted that fine provincial reaching towards a patrician grandeur. There came a day when sugar was not what is used to be.

Great families departed from Garvel Street and retired to rural parts on the substantial savings from the wreck. But they left behind them in Garvel Street an atmosphere, almost a tradition, an awareness of which affected the emotions of young Malcolm Tweedie as he walked up the road in the dark with Pat Rennie. Ardently he hoped

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that his new friend would invite him in; he burned to see what a big house was like. Just as ardently he hoped that he might be spared that social ordeal.

They came to the great closed gates of The Scaur and paused there. Their talk was of the prospects of the XV against Spiers School on Saturday.

"Better come in with me," said Rennie at last, impulsively. "You've loads of time."

"Oh, I don't know . . ." hesitated Malcolm, cursing himself for his social ineptitude.

"Oh, come on!" insisted Rennie. "We don't feed for two hours yet."

They walked up the drive, past dark groves of laurel and rhododendron and round smooth capes of impeccable turf. Through a belt of light they passed, and Malcolm had a glimpse of a great shining limousine in a house and a chauffeur busy with hose pipe and brush.

"The car's in. Dad must be home," said Rennie casually.

So they came to a flight of steps leading, at an angle more gentle than Malcolm had ever encountered in steps, to a vestibule as large as the kitchen in Mountjoy Street. Above them—so Malcolm felt—towered a cliff of painted masonry. The door at the end of the vestibule was inconceivably grand, like a great window in a church. Malcolm had the feeling that Rennie must ring and await the appearance of a manservant, but his friend

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laid an impious hand on the knob and threw open the door with a casual, "Come into the shack."

The hall astonished Malcolm. This, he realised, could not be described as a lobby. It was incontestably a hall in the grand manner. The walls were panelled in dark wood and decorated with the heads of animals slain in the chase. The floor was of polished wood, with a rug here and there on its shining expanse, like islands in the ocean. The chamber was dimly lit through an alabaster bowl far up towards the high ceiling. The stairs swept up magnificently from the far end to the dark and tremendous mysteries of the first floor. It was all tremendous to Malcolm, with a massive richness that overwhelmed him. It was almost too much for his powers of adaptation, and he would have embraced the opportunity to flee the high social implications of such an environment.

"Chuck your cap on the chair," he heard Rennie's cool voice irreverently advise him.

He followed his host across that acre of grandeur. They passed through a door in the lee of the great staircase, along a passage and so into a spacious apartment that Malcolm at once took to be the conservatory. Then he realised that billiard tables are not usual features of conservatories. This was to him a quite remarkable chamber. Its high walls were of glass, and they rose to support a lofty dome, through which the early stars blinked

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cheerfully. There was that great billiard table in the middle of the space, and then a forest of palms and exotic plants behind. Before a high-banked fire stood a fender like a settee. Deep chairs of great richness offered at various points their wanton embraces.

Malcolm came to the thoughtful conclusion that this was what you call a Winter Garden.

"Squat where you like," said Rennie; "here by the fire. It's cold to-night."

While Malcolm gave himself thoughtfully to the caresses of an ample chair, Rennie thrust before his eyes a blue dish piled high with apples.

"Have one."

Half boys, half men, they munched the fruit and talked gravely of the Leaving Certificate exams. They agreed that, while English and French were dead easy, trig, was a positive stinker.

"Never could get the hang of the beastly stuff," said Rennie.

"Awful muck!" Malcolm agreed eagerly.

They had another apple apiece.

The door opened before Malcolm was aware that anybody had come down the passage. He looked up and, with a sinking heart, beheld the smiling face of a lady. She was beautifully dressed, so Malcolm thought, in the sort of dress he had, from the amphitheatre, seen ladies wearing in the stalls at the opera. There was that about her which told

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him that this woman did not work at domestic tasks as his mother worked. She carried with her a faint and lovely fragrance of violets.

"Pat, darling . . ." she began to her son.

Malcolm noted that "darling." Jock would have called it soft—in fact, haw-haw. It is not thus that the working people of Clydeside bandy endearments in the domestic circle.

"O mater! . . . This is Tweedie. We've just come up from Rugger."

"How do you do?"

Malcolm clutched at a white, extended hand, and shook it violently. His thought was all on the tone of the lady's voice—kindly enough, but cool, cool.

"How do you do?" he blundered.

"And where do you live?"

Mrs. Rennie did not care in the least. She made conversation as pleasantly as need be. But the effect of the question on Malcolm was shattering. He was aware of shame.

"Mountjoy Street, Mrs. Rennie," he said humbly.

"Oh!" The reply had surprised her, shocked her a little. "Mountjoy Street! I see. . . ." She turned quickly to her son: "Don't be late changing, dear. Dinner's at seven to-night."

Dinner at seven. Was it even so? thought Malcolm who had dinner each day at one—except Sundays, when it was served solemnly at four. He

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became aware of the white hand held out to him, and again he seized it.

"Good night," and the fine clothes swept silently through the door.

"I'd better be going," said Malcolm just a little sullenly.

"No hurry . . ." was the perfunctory reply from his friend.

When he did go, his heart was heavy. He had encountered something beyond him. He felt that he could not possibly live up to these grandeurs implied by attendance at the Academy. Mrs. Rennie and her fine clothes: the spaciousness of the house and the richness of the furnishing—these were alien, frightening things, tacitly imposing on him burdens that he could not possibly shoulder.

As he walked home, Malcolm fiercely hated The Scaur and all it stood for and just as fiercely loved the unpretentious simplicity of his mother's house, where the family ate in the kitchen and his father took off his jacket before sitting down to a meal. It was all wrong, that contradiction, and he was being asked to reconcile its elements. He felt that fate was making an unfair call on him to live simultaneously in two worlds.

His heart admitted that he was terribly jealous of Rennie and the security and comfort that were his. And he remained very proud of having made his familiar acquaintance.

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### III

It was really a double life that young Malcolm led. His two worlds were definitely separated by the frontier of Nelson Street, which he must cross each day to pass from the kindly crudities of Mountjoy Street to the larger pretences of the Academy and its social atmosphere. Every day in life he had to make rapid and considerable adjustments to these different environments.

He was never unhappy thereafter at the Academy. An invitation to The Scaur did not come his way again, but he and Rennie remained in the school and on the playing field on friendly terms. He was accepted all round as normal, no longer a keelie; a bit of a swot, of course, but that was not essentially a social stigma. Pat Rennie himself, for that matter, was a bit of a stew. Malcolm was in good company. And he played a decent game of football. He got along.

The trouble was personal to him, all in his own young mind. He was acutely aware of the social atmospheres in which he moved, and he hated the necessary adjustments. It remained with him always—that irksome notion of false pretence on one hand, of pretentiousness on the other.

It was as difficult in the tenement flat in Mountjoy Street as at The Scaur, for his graduation to the Academy set him in contrast to Jock and the humble academic course Jock had pursued. There



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was, for instance, the question of travelling expenses. The XV's and XI's of the Academy had to fulfil fixtures on the distant grounds of other secondary schools. Now a journey to Glasgow would be involved—return fare and lunch; sometimes a trip as far as Edinburgh. The economics of these outings had to be considered seriously in Mountjoy Street.

"Five shillings!" Mr. Tweedie would exclaim on Friday evenings. "It's a lot of money, Malcolm."

"Oh, dear! But it's a terrible expense that school of yours," the housewifely voice of Mrs. Tweedie would chime in.

The cash was forthcoming, of course, but not before Jock had committed the inevitable, fraternal, grumbling blunder.

"You never saw me getting five bob to go and play football in Glasgow. Blooming swank!"

"Wheesht now, Jock!" Mrs. Tweedie would hasten to say, observing that Malcolm winced. "Don't be a silly big goose."

"All very well. Five bob! Never saw me getting five bob. . . . Blooming swank, that's what it is."

It was always left to Mr. Tweedie, nervously eager for the social advancement of his younger son, to apply the closure.

"Will you hold your tongue, you!"

And these sharp words, accompanied by the fiercest glare of the lanternist, would send the

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amiable lout out of the room to seek solace in his own mysterious fashion.

"You shouldn't have spoke so sharp to the lad, Tam," Mrs. Tweedie would say, seeking like every mother to have it both ways.

"Sharp, yer-Auntie-Kate!" Mr. Tweedie would retort grimly.

That sort of thing did not make it any easier for Malcolm, who had with him always that acute consciousness of his debt to his parents. Nevertheless he went eagerly enough on Saturday mornings to play football or cricket for his school—went with his betters, as the phrase goes, to play his betters, and lived for an hour or two in a social atmosphere more spacious than boys from Mountjoy Street commonly breathe. With the sons of men who could buy out his father fifty times over he crowded into cold compartments of Caledonian Railway carriages and shouted all the way to Glasgow like one of the elect. Other boys might talk easily of their parents' cars or of holidays abroad, but Malcolm did not suffer. It was when he came back from these outings to Mountjoy Street that the trouble began.

Usually, the team returned from victory or defeat early on Saturday afternoons. For most Academy boys the rest of the day was spent according to ancient custom. Either you went to the Battery to watch the Wanderers play Rugby, or else you occupied a front bench in Green Park

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and criticised, as from the academic position, the batting of the local XI, to which you hoped to graduate one day. For Malcolm these delights were forbidden by his own conscience. Somehow he felt that the week-ends should be devoted to his own people. Deliberately, almost violently, he wrenched his mind away from the pleasant amenities of school life and bent it to the humbler service of his kin.

Gladly, as one who does a welcome penance, he would accompany his mother on her frugal Saturday afternoon shopping through the back streets of the town. Then he carried a net bag, proud of his willingness to assist in this homely service and yet apprehensive lest one of his superior acquaintances should blunder into the domestic secret. He would not have failed his mother; he would have died rather than betray his kith and his kind—but the Academy had drilled into him a tender sense of the social proprieties.

Mrs. Tweedie, however, did not often demand his escort. She loved to have it, but she insisted, good woman, that her boy should behave himself as a boy.

“Away and play yourself, laddie,” she would say cheerfully when he made his faithful offer of service.

Play himself! He did not want, somehow, on Saturday afternoon, to cross the frontier of Nelson Street again and watch the amusements of the

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West End. He would have liked it if his father had been disposed to walking in the country, but Mr. Tweedie was of sedentary habit. In summer he might play a cautious game of bowls on the green in Holm Street, but in the winter he inclined, like some hibernating animal, to the solace of sleep. It was Mr. Tweedie's custom, on the short afternoons of the winter months, to lay himself at length on a chair before the fire, turn his gaunt and sallow face to the ceiling, place a newspaper like a white roof over his features, and give himself over to slumber. There he would snore steadily until, by some magic of subconscious mnemonic, he would waken at half-past four, fix his good wife with a dreary eye, and utter the invariable question:

"What about a dish of tea, Nance?"

"Och, you and your tea!" Mrs. Tweedie would say with a fond, feigned impatience.

It was Malcolm's habit then to obey an instinct of fraternal loyalty and walk up the hill on Saturday afternoons to the Madman's Park, where Jock was wont to pursue a promising career as a centre-forward. It was not a picturesque park, even before it was overlaid by a municipal housing scheme—a bare oblong of mud on a slope, swept by the winds and showers from the southwest, overlooked by the gaunt brick façade of the Medina Mill. Yet here was a proper setting for Jock, the plebeian, the tough leader of ten tough, bustling, noisy foot-

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ballers. If Malcolm was out of his element as a spectator at these rough-and-tumble contests in the mud, with the hoarse shouts and foul objurgations of lowborn partisans about his ears, Jock was very much in his, plunging down the field on stocky, muscular legs, charging his opponents with a sort of hearty ferocity, taking penalty kicks with an accuracy and an intensity of purpose he could not bring to any other activity of existence. Jock was a man, a leader, on the Madman's Park.

It was an oddly moving experience for Malcolm to stand there through the grey afternoon of the northern winter, participating however distantly in the rough, simple amusements of the commoner of his two worlds. Here he was aware of himself as an Academy boy, an alien, unable to lose himself in the uncomplicated enthusiasms of the crowd. And he hated his aloofness, resented his own possession of a discriminating intelligence and fastidious nerves. He always felt sad when the winter sun went down among red, wet clouds behind the hill and the last whistle blew and he had to walk home alone down the grey streets in the reeky dust. But he could not fit himself into Jock's rough circle any more than he could find an abiding place among his betters at the Academy.

The family tea in the bright kitchen was always pleasant. Mrs. Tweedie put her best foot foremost on Saturday nights. She proceeded accord-

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ing to a vague feminine theory that the male system requires extra alimentation at the week-ends. So she cooked kippers—and did not fry them, which is a smelly process and advertises domestic secrets to the neighbours, but plunged them into boiling water in a baking tin, with excellent results. Or there were haddies and poached eggs. Or black puddings. Or potted head. Her three men never failed to appreciate her efforts.

Malcolm's Saturday nights were spent according to a rigid plan. It was his duty about seven to go to McCuaig's in Blane Street and purchase on his father's behalf one ounce of Hammerhead Plug—"the usual" as the quantity and the brand were known to both Mr. Tweedie and plump Miss McCuaig. Then he passed down the street to Miss Semple's and bought for his mother a quarter of what that good woman called "black-strippit ba's"—they do not speak of bulls' eyes on Clydeside. With these comforts in his overcoat pocket, he passed down Nelson Street to the musty, intimate atmosphere of the Garth Memorial Library, frowned studiously over the periodicals on the table, and finally chose two books from the Science section before returning home through the drizzle or the fog or under a high, cold moon.

Usually he was home by eight. His mother would be by the fire, at rest at last, with her *People's Friend* on her knee and a stocking between

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her quick fingers. Mr. Tweedie, puffing the dust of the last ounce of Hammerhead, might be trying a slow fall with the elements of Trigonometry as expounded by Messrs. Hall and Knight in one of Malcolm's schoolbooks.

"Well, son," the mother would greet him.

"Back, are you?" Mr. Tweedie would say more grudgingly, reaching out for the tobacco.

Malcolm was free then to settle down in the pleasant peace of the kitchen with the books he had brought from the Library. And so they would sit silent till Mr. Tweedie looked grimly towards his wife and uttered his formal, menacing question.

"Where's that fellow Jock?" as if Mrs. Tweedie were wholly responsible.

It was not long after that before the mother would smile at her baby and speak fondly.

"Time wee boys were in their bed."

There was no appeal against that on Saturday night, which was the evening of the week set aside for Malcolm's bath.

### IV

In two worlds, then, lived young Malcolm Tweedie, and in each he was as happy as any clever boy may be. There were times, however, when the superior young gentlemen of the Academy blundered by accident across the frontier of Nelson



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Street, saw him among his own people, and jeered. Then he was unhappy, reminded again of these social differences that seemed such important factors in existence.

There were, for instance, wet Saturday mornings when Malcolm had nothing better to do than to walk along Holm Street and look into the low-browed shop that was the headquarters of Mr. Tweedie's plumbing and bell-hanging business. They were not impressive premises, though a fat roll of sheet lead, imprisoned by clasps below the window, suggested to the observant that Mr. Tweedie was a lucky man who could afford to leave so much capital sunk in the form of advertisement. In the window itself were various specimens of incandescent-gas fittings, a bright porcelain handle with the word "Pull" emblazoned thereon, and a shiny picture portraying a lady in the coy act of testing with her toe the temperature of a bath dependent on one of Messrs. Ewart's geysers for its supply of hot water.

The shop was decidedly more interesting within, for on opening the door—which operated in a highly efficient manner an electric bell that would not cease ringing till the door was shut again—the visitor discovered himself in something more than a shop; a showroom and workshop combined. At the back were benches littered with the blow-lamps and soldering bolts and other paraphernalia of a mysterious trade. Jock was often at work there,

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a scowl on his gothic features. And between the benches and the door stood such a frank array of sanitary utensils as might have scared away from Mr. Tweedie's shop the patronage of delicate-minded folks.

That amazing platoon of porcelain receptacles was much in favour with retired persons in the district, who, cronies of the thoughtful Mr. Tweedie, were wont on wet Saturday forenoons to daunder down to the shop and take comfortable, if somewhat suggestive, seats on the patron's stock in trade. From these quaint rostrums they were accustomed to deliver the tough, niggling arguments that old men love to exchange.

On this scene one morning entered Malcolm at a loose end. Old Mr. Macnair, late checkweigher with the Harbour Trust, was with some heat conducting the affirmative side of an argument against Mr. Tweed, the barber, as to whether the great fire at the Paper Mill in 1901 was, or was not, a deliberate act of arson. The old gentlemen were heated. From behind a sort of counter Mr. Tweedie was seeking to keep the peace. None looked up when Malcolm entered and slipped to a seat near the door.

There he sat, listening indifferently to the nagging futilities of the old men. His eyes were vaguely on the drizzle of rain outside, and his thoughts were on the forthcoming bursary examination for the University of Glasgow. Sometimes

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he marked the shining dome of a passing umbrella above the window partition.

His attention was definitely attracted at length by the appearance of a maroon cap above that wooden screen. The Academy cap. . . . He wanted to rise and run to where Jock was toiling over a blow lamp at a bench behind. The cap moved slowly, as if its owner were studying in detail the gas fittings on display in the window. Then the peak rose, and a pair of eyes looked above the screen and fixed their gaze on the Academy cap of Malcolm, who was shaming it so blatantly on his lavatory seat.

It was Tom Crockett, son of the refiner, from whose vast works there floated into the plumber's shop the thick aroma of boiling sugar. Crockett was of the superior kind. The cruel, satirical, and indecent joke against Malcolm lived in the Academy till he had left it forever.

It was not the only joke of the kind that Malcolm's domestic circumstances provided for the delight of his schoolmates. Returning one day from a practice game at the Battery with Crockett and others he was expansively greeted by a very dirty young man in dungarees.

"Haw, Malkie! Does yer mother know ye're out!"

Round the neck of this young man was hung a wooden lavatory seat.

"Hullo, Alec!" said Malcolm faintly.

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It was Alec Ross, a fellow apprentice with Jock in Mr. Tweedie's employment.

"Who's your friend, Tweedie?" asked Crockett dryly, and the others guffawed.

It hurt Malcolm sorely. They took care that the jest should circulate through the school. No normal schoolboy will willingly suffer a lavatory joke to die. And against Malcolm they could direct the social sting. They even ferreted out the fact that on Sundays Mr. Tweedie acted in the menial office of beadle in the Martyrs Free Church and, in frock coat and white tie, stoked the fires and carried the minister's books into the pulpit with a flourish. The son of a beadle—in a small Free Church at that!

### v

It mattered much at the time; but time passes and brings with it the solution of all troubles. Growing older, Malcolm learned to forget the social rubs in his essential, devouring passion for knowledge. That was the core of his existence. External circumstances might hurt his pride or abrade his nerves, but the real Malcolm held steadily to his job of learning, learning, learning. There came a day when all the trials of his self-consciousness were swamped in the triumph that pure brains had won him.

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The Academy prize-giving ceremony was held invariably in the Temperance Institute on the last lawful day of June each year. Six hundred fidgeting boys and girls were then confined in the area of that gloomy tabernacle, while flustered parents, mainly mothers, doted from the gallery on the girl with ribbons in her hair or the boy in Sunday suit and Eton collar. A heavy, municipal personality sat in the chair on the platform, surrounded by smiling members of the School Board. Here, there and everywhere darted Mr. Ainslie, officious but effective. The atmosphere seemed to tingle with self-congratulation.

On the last day of his association with the Academy, almost overcome by a queer emotion he did not quite understand, Malcolm sat modestly in the lee of a cast-iron pillar in this crowded hall. He was very much aware of great affairs toward. There were prizes for him up there on the platform; his mother, dressed to the nines, was somewhere in the balcony above. He was destined, for two solid minutes at least, to be a prominent figure in this gathering. He wished they would hurry and get it over.

But the annual prize giving was a deliberate business. There were six prize winners in each of twelve classes, and every mother's son or daughter of them had to await Mr. Ainslie's loud call on his or her name, advance to the rostrum, bow, and re-

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ceive a book, and retire. They did not, in the Academy, deal with the deserving in batches. The third prize winner in Swedish Drill for Junior IV was accorded equal honour with the premier classicist of Senior VI.

A lengthy process it was, and an hour had to pass before Malcolm need listen agog for the utterance of his name. Impatiently he watched the endless procession of girls and boys towards the platform and back again. The hands of the clock in the balcony moved ever so slowly. It was as if they tortured him. . . . Senior III: Senior IV. . . Would they never get to Senior VI and be done with it!

At last, near noon, he saw Mr. Ainslie fold up his papers and sit down. The colourless lady who handed out books all morning stood back. The chairman rose.

“Ladies and Gentlemen . . .”

These innocuous words were greeted by an amazingly loud burst of handclapping from the area.

“Ladies and gentlemen, as you all know, the Academy awards each year three special prizes—the Gow Prize for general knowledge, the Rowan Prize for Classics, the Fairgrieve Prize for Mathematics.”

A burst of contralto cheering from six hundred young and healthy throats signified that the Academy knew and approved of these facts.

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"Well, ladies and gentlemen, it is my very great privilege to inform you that for the first time in the history of the school these three prizes have been won by one boy . . ." The speaker paused significantly: "Malcolm Tweedie. . . ."

It seemed to Malcolm that his name had been called through a megaphone by a giant. He stood up, but a sea of faces seemed to be swirling about him. Then he wanted to sit down again. A hoarse and irreverent voice at his side steadied him.

"Go on, Tweedie, you dirty little swot."

So he staggered to the platform, while the cries of his fellows beat about his ears. A lady in grey put into his arms a collection of heavy books. Somebody attempted to shake his right hand, which was quite full. He found that he could not bow above the load. He turned away—then turned back at the bidding of Mr. Ainslie's pontifical voice. One hand upraised, the headmaster had quieted the cheering from the area. He spoke.

"Let me add one word to what our chairman has said. I have just received from the Registrar of Glasgow University a letter which should make us of the Academy very proud, very proud indeed. In the Bursary Competition, the first place—I repeat, the first place—has been taken, so the letter informs me, by Malcolm Tweedie."

For an hour thereafter Malcolm's mind was incapable of coherent thought, even of coherent



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vision. For the rest of his life, however, he bore in his memory a picture of his mother, with a wet, red face and her hat over her right eye, sobbing in the vestibule of the Temperance Institute.

“O, sonny boy! Sonny boy!”

## CHAPTER III

### I

IT WAS in 1450 that the good Bishop Turnbull, wishful to increase the credit of Mother Church, obtained from Pope Nicholas V a bull of ratification for the establishment of the University of Glasgow. Ten years later my Lord Hamilton endowed a college on a site now covered by a railway goods yard; and in this college generations of young Scotsmen lived the academic life, brightening the wynds above the Molendinar with the flirt of their scarlet gowns.

They lived within the walls, these students of the past, just as young men of Oxford and Cambridge live to-day. But the Scottish University is for the poor as well as for the rich; the lad from the Hebrides, with his bag of oatmeal for sustenance through the winter, could not face the expense of the traditional mode, and the collegiate system died with the eighteenth century. When there arose in 1870 a great Gothic pile on the western ridge of Gilmorehill, that characteristic product of the genius of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott offered no accommodation to the resident undergraduate.

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Thus, by the mysterious workings of history, Mrs. Tweedie was obliged to make a journey to Glasgow in order that lodgings might be found for Malcolm. About the task she went gravely and with a sense of responsibility. Launching her son upon the wide seas of life, she was yet eager to assure herself that he would sail from a port as like as possible that which he had always known. She had heard queer things about lodgings for young men in the city. Mother and son travelled together by the ten-twenty with one-day tickets. No longer a schoolboy, Malcolm wore a tweed cap with a jutting scoop that partially occulted his pale and anxious face.

Had they but known it, the Students' Representative Council would have provided them with a nicely printed list of approved lodgings, but the Tweedies had few friends in the academic tradition. They had advertised in the *Citizen*—certainly an excellent medium for the purpose, for it had brought them forty-nine replies, covering a very considerable area of the city of Glasgow. These letters were sifted by Mrs. Tweedie with all the vigour of a police censor. So, with a short leet of ten in her black leather purse, she came to Glasgow in search of, as she expressed it, "a decent woman with a nice clean room."

Her first choice led her to Garnethill, that interesting collection of tenement houses high on the ridge of a clay drumlin above Sauchiehall

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Street. It was a mistaken policy, for Garnethill is the dingy Montparnasse of Clydeside. It is crowned by the clifflike gables of the School of Art and infested by types of humanity beyond the sympathy of a plumber's decent wife—painters, musicians, models, and ladies of doubtful occupation. Actors on tour lodge up there on the hill, and pianos tinkle late into the night.

Their first experiences were depressing. Mrs. Tweedie was distressed and shocked to find the landladies in Garnethill, if called before noon, are apt to answer the doors in dingy peignoirs. For Malcolm, it was most embarrassing. He saw yellow hair hanging loose or gathered hastily into wispy, soiled boudoir caps. He saw raddled faces that had been freshened with powder instead of soap, and eyes that were deeply ringed in blue. He saw bare feet in bedroom slippers and, once, a thrilling length of stockinged leg through the slit of a dressing gown hastily assumed. While his mother spoke to one gushing lady in a purple petticoat and a pale blue dressing jacket, he saw flit across the dark lobby beyond the figure of a girl, and he wondered darkly if it was really true that his virgin eyes had beheld a girl—a girl without so much as a skirt of any description on her person.

Mrs. Tweedie marched purposefully down the stairs of that particular tenement. Malcolm noticed that her face was as grim as it could ever be.

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"This'll no' do at all," she said. "We'll try up the Woodlands Road."

They had tea and mutton pies in a baker's shop at Charing Cross and in the early afternoon proceeded more cheerfully with their task. Their first ring—at a first-floor house in Arlington Street—was answered by a brisk, smiling woman of middle age. Mrs. Tweedie knew at once that here was one to whom she would confidently entrust the welfare and virtue of her boy.

"Just step in and I'll show you the room," said Miss Mackenzie. She smiled on Malcolm. "So you're for the University, are you?" and he felt that the ordeal of lodgings might not be so bad after all.

It was certainly a large and airy chamber into which they were shown. These houses in Arlington Street were built for douce Victorian people whom the prosperity of industrialism had urged westwards into the mansions of Kelvinside. Miss Mackenzie, it is true, had apparently taken over the æsthetic taste of her Victorian predecessors. The wall paper was of a surly red and thickly strewn with ill-assorted ornaments. Here was a photograph of the R.M.S. *Columba* leaving Rothesay pier; here a plate in a plush frame with an outrageous duck among stiff rushes painted on its mat surface; there an enlarged and slightly pallid photograph of a child in a sailor's suit, clinging timidly to the shrouds of a studio barque. There

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was a cabinet full of china against the back wall; beside it a painted screen. A pale blue drain pipe held a clutch of dusty bulrushes, and there were dry sprays of honesty in the vases beside the glass wind bells on the mantelpiece. A great black clock, like the tomb of a prosperous bailie, frowned above the fireplace and across to the narrow bed against the side wall. It had stopped, one day long ago, at twenty-three minutes past four.

But these features represented precisely Mrs. Tweedie's ideal of a well-furnished room. While she spoke to Miss Mackenzie, her plump fingers felt the quality of the clothes on the narrow bed. She was evidently pleased. A price was named and accepted. Whereupon Mrs. Tweedie launched out on a fully detailed account of Malcolm's tastes, digestion and underwear. It transpired, from Mrs. Tweedie's account, that greasy things did not sit well on his stomach. Miss Mackenzie fully appreciated these points. . . . Malcolm wondered whether it was in the early morning or in the afternoon that the black clock had stopped that day long ago.

Great cordiality marked the parting.

"Well, I'll look for him on Monday week," said Miss Mackenzie, smiling valediction over the railing of the stairs.

"Well, that's nice," said Mrs. Tweedie in the street again. "I think we'll just have another wee cup of tea."

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### II

With his belongings packed in a Japanese hamper of antique design, young Malcolm Tweedie presented himself in Arlington Street one pearly afternoon of October. He was warmly welcomed, plunged at once, indeed, into the thick of a process described by Miss Mackenzie as "making him feel at home." In her healthy, sentimental enthusiasm, the good woman did not realise what social tortures she was inflicting on the boy.

Malcolm had come to Glasgow to work. His was an almost rabid anticipation of study. There was before him always that wonderful mirage of knowledge, and, beyond that again, a clever boy's high dream of the Career. He had not pictured Miss Mackenzie as figuring in the scheme, save as the shadowy provider of a room in which he might work at night. It surprised him greatly, and frightened him vaguely, when he discovered that Miss Mackenzie's ideas of hospitality were conceived on generous lines. This pleasant and pleasant-looking spinster of middle age had, even in her impeccable virginity, the sense of domesticity highly developed.

Malcolm knew in a vague way that there was another lodger in the house—a phantasmal Mr. Pottie, understood to be an apprentice to the Law and a student. He had, therefore, imagined a quiet, hard-working household. He had not reckoned



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with Mrs. Dinwiddie, for instance. Venturing from his room, shortly after his arrival, on a timid expedition towards the bathroom, he bumped against a body in the dark lobby of the flat.

"I beg your pardon," said Malcolm politely.

There was no response. Head down, the person charged past him at a high rate of speed and disappeared into the kitchen. The apparition was explained at high tea in the dining room. Opposite Malcolm at that meal sat a woman with a sort of knobbly face and thick spectacles. She was entirely absorbed in her task of eating and did not concern herself with her neighbours.

"You haven't met my sister, Mrs. Dinwiddie," said Miss Mackenzie in a loud frank voice. "She's a widow and she can't see two yards in front of her."

Malcolm thought it extremely odd and embarrassing that a lady should be thus frankly discussed in her presence, but Miss Mackenzie was quick to interpret his expression.

"Oh, you needn't bother. She's as deaf as a post, poor soul."

It became obvious that Mrs. Dinwiddie was an object of tolerant pity. Malcolm came to learn that the widow helped about the house, but that her service was extremely unreliable. This was due to Mrs. Dinwiddie's habit of burying herself and the baffling individuality of a deaf person in the feuilletons of the newspapers. It appeared that

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Mrs. Dinwiddie was capable of following simultaneously the tortuous courses of seven serial stories. She was often to be found in corners of the house, sitting rapt with scraps of newsprint held four inches from the thick spectacles over her small eyes. There was in the house a legend to the effect that, while thus occupied, Mrs. Dinwiddie had suffered the kitchen sink to overflow so that the premises of the dentist on the ground flat were completely and expensively flooded. Her narrow escapes from death in the city streets were numbered in scores.

Then there was Mrs. Dinwiddie's son, Matthew. Matthew was a grave young man of silent habit, reputed to be brainy. He could write the letters C.A. after his name and dealt daily with the most intimate finances of limited companies. But not one actuarial scandal escaped the somewhat sulky lips of Matthew. It seemed as if he had somehow acquired from his mother the secret of aloofness; his egg-shaped face seldom betrayed anything beyond an apparently generous impassivity. But you felt, nevertheless, that Matthew, though silent, was all and always there.

And Mr. Pottie . . . Mr. Pottie was a surprise to Malcolm, who had concluded that a student of law must be like himself, young and a little raw. But Mr. Pottie, thin in the face and grey in the hair, was nearly forty. One gathered that he had had a past; not so much with the world, the flesh

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and the devil as with the economic barriers across the path of success. Mr. Pottie, in short, had failed in several walks of life. He had a disturbing habit of referring to old days in Burma, and then in Spain. His manner was large and allusive. And whatever else he was, Mr. Pottie was unmistakably a Gentleman, even if now he, in middle age, was working out his tedious indentures to a solicitor.

It was Malcolm's first appalling discovery that there was no escaping this group of fellow creatures and the conventions of the little world they made up. A fellow could get through his breakfast alone and in peace, but a free and generous interchange of conversation at the evening meal was a fetish with Miss Mackenzie, who liked things to be homely. Malcolm knew that he was not good at general conversation over a polite tea table. It was trouble enough for him to avoid the commission of some flagrant sin against the etiquette of eating. At Miss Mackenzie's he learned for the first time that there were knives and knives—fish knives, for example. They had not differentiated so nicely in Mountjoy Street.

Mrs. Dinwiddie and Matthew placed no social difficulties in his way, of course, and Miss Mackenzie's concern with the sentimental aspect of affairs was easily coped with. It was intercourse with Mr. Pottie that troubled Malcolm most. He had a curious, enquiring mind, had Mr. Pottie, and

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a somewhat irritating way of professing his own complete ignorance.

"I say, Tweedie," he would begin over the last cup of tea in his thin, ingratiating voice, "I say, I'm most *frightfully*—oh, *frightfully*—ignorant." It was his habit to italicize the adverbs. "But I say, Tweedie, do explain to me if it's true that doctors *really* believe in the prescriptions they write."

Malcolm might reply that, being as yet concerned with biology merely, the matter was outside his province. But at other times, Mr. Pottie's tone would annoy him, and he would launch out at large, only to find himself in a maze of futile and abstract argument with his fellow lodger.

Or Mr. Pottie wanted to know why leaves were green, and then doubted the scientific explanation of chlorophyl. Or he made a strong stand for homeopathy. Or for osteopathy. And when Malcolm attempted a defence of the orthodox position, Mr. Pottie would chip in with his quizzing, "But *really*, Tweedie, really . . ."

It made it all the more difficult that Mr. Pottie, though by no means a snob, was indubitably a Gentleman.

These social obligations came to weigh on Malcolm's mind. He had so much work to do; concentration was so vital to him. But there were so many distractions. Malcolm wanted to be alone with his studies.

There were distractions.

The city itself was distracting. There were nights when he could not settle down to Bower on "The Botany of the Living Plant," so alluring were the thundering sounds of the trams in Woodlands Road and the purring of swift cars up and down that thoroughfare. The feeling that he was missing something was often irresistible in its intensity, and sometimes he would pass quietly out of the house into the cheerful streets. The night life of Glasgow is hardly as vivid as that of Montmartre or Soho, but to this boy from a tenement house in a seaport town, the throng in Sauchiehall Street, the lights, the flickering of picture-house signs, the giggling, sidelong glances of courtesans, the malty smell breathed through the doors of public houses, the lighted tramcars, the long line of busy street with its parallel streaks of polished rail—all these things were intoxicating in a dark, hateful, delicious way. It was just the fundamental lack of cash and a presbyterian fear of discovering himself in evil that kept young Malcolm Tweedie from betraying the trust in his virtuous industry that his mother so fondly cherished.

Even with that to guard him, there were times when he fell from the grace of his own resolution. One evening it was Mr. Pottie who challenged his claim to manhood.

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"Doing anything this evening?" Mr. Pottie had said, encountering Malcolm at the door of the bath-room.

"Nothing special," said Malcolm, fearing the worst.

"What about a second house at the Empire?"

Malcolm hesitated for a moment, but then he blurted a fatal "Right O!" He was not going to be caught out in parochialism.

The second house at the Empire—in presbyterian Scotland—starts at a quarter to nine. High tea in Arlington Street was usually over by half-past six. It was in Mr. Pottie's conception of a night out that they should begin the evening shortly after seven.

Before they reached the door of the Empire at nine o'clock, Malcolm had visited three public houses in the company of one who was indubitably a Gentleman and a Man of the World. He had never been within a public house before. The first in which he showed a white, scared face was a glaring, noisy place in Holland Street.

"What is it to be, then," said Mr. Pottie.

"I think . . . I think I'll have a lemonade," said Malcolm.

"Oh, I say, Tweedie!" Mr. Pottie expostulated: "Really . . . Oh, you can't have lemonade, *really*. . . . A Number One Bass—what about that?"

"All right," said Malcolm desperately.

He hated the taste of the stuff, but he was forti-

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fied somehow by the fact that the beverage was described alternatively as "Barley Wine." Wine was not in the same base category with beer. He was more talkative, much more inclined to argue with Mr. Pottie when they came out again into the fresh air.

Malcolm had three bottles of Barley Wine that evening. As time passed, he began to like it. And the third bottle was consumed at a counter patronised, between acts, by genuine actors in all the romantic glory of paint and powder. He did not see them steadily, but he saw their significance whole. He wanted to engage them in conversation. Actually, with Mr. Pottie's hand under his right elbow, he said some sympathetic words to the policeman on point duty at the Renfield—Sauchiehall Street corner. At the same time, he was vividly aware of the fact that Mr. Pottie was laughing at him. He wanted to explain the whole metabolic process quite clearly to Mr. Pottie. . . . He was not *really* drunk. (In his mind, he adopted Mr. Pottie's habit of stressing the adverbs.) In fact, the whole business boiled down to a metaphysical question of the utmost nicety.

The show at the Empire passed over his head. For a few minutes he was prepared to argue against the world that Miss Hilda Glyder was the most beautiful woman in the history of humanity. He said so to Mr. Pottie, who laughed. But the phase of appreciation passed, and Malcolm became much



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more concerned with the curious things that were happening to his own sense of balance. One moment, the Empire Theatre of Varieties, including the proscenium, the conductor, and the occupant of the stage, threatened to swing right over his head. He found that to close his eyes was of no avail against this anti-Newtonian tendency of the world as he knew it. Then he wanted to go to sleep. . . . These moods alternated in a most irritating fashion. And Mr. Pottie was apparently quite sober.

In later days Malcolm could never remember how he got home and into bed that night. He did remember that in the mercy of Providence they arrived home too late for the cup of cocoa with which Miss Mackenzie was wont to refresh her lodgers before bedtime. Cocoa with blobs of fat on the surface. And his memory retained vivid and intimate impressions of certain passages in the darkness of the night.

These memories distressed and shamed him afterwards. He was never again unable to resist the invitation of Mr. Pottie.

### IV

Then there was Jock. Jock developed a habit of visiting Glasgow once a week. He did not always look up his studious brother, but often enough he appeared at Miss Mackenzie's tea table,

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a genial, empty-headed giant. While Malcolm writhed, Jock would engage with the innocent candour of the fat-headed in elaborate discussions with Mr. Pottie. Why he should be there at all was a mystery. Malcolm gathered during his occasional weed-end visits home that the erratic behaviour of Jock was causing a deal of concern in Mountjoy Street.

At all events it was Jock who, on one of these excursions to the city, took Malcolm from the placid and studious amenities of Arlington Street into a world that excited and fascinated and frightened him. In Glasgow he learned more than they taught him at the University—more about life and, in this case, more about Jock.

“Ever seen a glove fight?” was Jock’s surprising question one Friday evening when he appeared unexpectedly in Malcolm’s room.

“Glove fight? You mean a boxing match?”

“Yes. There’s a great scrap at the Victoria tonight. You’ll see some ruddy wallops if you like. Coming?”

Again Malcolm could not resist the allure of the city.

“I don’t mind if I do,” he said.

They caught the tram for Dalmarnock at Charing Cross. It hummed along Bothwell Street, past the Central Station, down the long corridor of Argyle Street, and so into territory darkly unfamiliar to Malcolm. Those dark streets and

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mysterious tenements seemed to menace him. It was all strange, this old part of the city, and the more bewildering and oppressive for that. Before it was time to get off, Malcolm had given up hope, as it were, and abandoned himself to the most desperate possibilities.

Up a dark lane they went, through a group of silent stragglers round a narrow door, and in through a wooden turnstile. The narrow passage was ill-lit; a single electric lamp gleamed pallidly through a smoky atmosphere.

"This way," said a voice.

They scrambled over forms, jostling those occupying them, and found empty chairs on the uppermost tier of eight—then looked round curiously. Malcolm was conscious of his respectability among those men, who sucked hard at cigarettes, wore knotted mufflers and tweed caps, and patiently spat on the floor from time to time. They were mainly of a type: hard faces and high cheek bones; and the stare of hundreds was disconcerting. Here and there were men of middle age, solid and sombre, puffing blasts from briar pipes; thin mobile faces of Jews exotically varied the rows of sterner northern countenances. And they all seemed to be regarding Malcolm and his brother as intruders, suspiciously. Then Malcolm became aware that they stared at him only because the real business of the night was delayed. Their true interest was in that square platform in the

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centre of this building, so like a converted stable. They were waiting for the Game to begin. It was long past the advertised hour. The smoke from their cigarettes clouded the air.

They waited. After a time, the half-Watt lamps above the platform came out to flood the place with hard, candid light. Nothing happened: and still they had to wait. Then two pairs of padded gloves were thrown ceremoniously over the thick ropes round the platform. A heavy man clambered after them and stood, grinning sheepishly, while he was introduced as the referee. The proceedings seemed to hang fire once again. Malcolm then became aware of a commotion. The crowd about the door was shifting and swaying. A murmur of comment arose everywhere. Finally a procession forced its way to the side of the ring. It was headed by men in bright green jerseys, carrying towels, buckets, sponges, and bottles full of water. Two youngsters in overcoats detached themselves and crawled beneath the ropes to take seats in different corners. A gentleman in pince-nez addressed the crowd explanatorily; the referee cautioned the youngsters, who shook hands; the padded gloves were fitted carefully to bandaged fists; the men in green jerseys ran fond fingers over the muscles of their charges and whispered darkly; the cigarettes were trampled under heavy feet.

"Seconds out," said a quiet voice.

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A bell rang. (It was pressed, Malcolm discovered later, by a mild-faced man with benevolent gold spectacles; he would not have been out of place in a vestry). The youngsters dropped their overcoats and stood up, nearly naked, expectantly poised, in the centre of the ring.

To Malcolm it seemed altogether brutal at first. The white, lissom bodies shone almost obscenely in the glare, and then, when the red blotches showed over the kidneys and on the chest, it seemed unnecessarily cruel. Primitive—he had the feeling of assisting at a pagan combat. The gloves did not qualify it at all. There was no escaping the dull, nauseous smack of blows, the vicious jab of a punch intended to hurt, the quick gleam of temper revealed in a baring of teeth or a grimace.

Yet he had to learn that this preliminary bout was only the trifling of children. The heavyweights came on and demonstrated how much the human frame can stand in the way of punishment. This was hitting with a vengeance. The fists went slogging ruthlessly to the vulnerable parts—hammering on the kidneys in a clinch, smashing over the heart, crashing to the jaw. Blood was drawn—there was a yell of primitive passion from the spectators. It came pouring down, red and wet, over a cruel face, till it seemed, as the pugilist advanced crouching on him who had delivered the blow, that the fighters had gone back to the law

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of the wild, and that it would not stop until one of them was battered insensible. But, fantastic relief! the gong was sounded by the little man with the face of a missionary. The fighters went back to their corners to have the blood washed from their glistening bodies. Then the battle went on again: a scuffle—a thud—the snore of hard-drawn breath—smears of blood diluted in the water from the buckets—dancing feet—thin lips drawn back from white, clenched teeth. While the spectators passionately urged them to slaughter.

Curiously, Malcolm became accustomed to it, and learned to look upon the blood and temper as incidental. Those fighters were men of skill, after all. They were employing the resources of a science. All the feeling, the emotion, the primordial passion was in those who watched them strive. At the end the boxers shook hands with a smile, while obscenity was being bandied about the seats above the ring, and slipped into their dressing gowns and ducked beneath the ropes.

Horror first, then interest in the skill of it, then a sort of bored amusement with the heavy convention of it all—that was the sequence of Malcolm's feelings. For it came to this in the end, he realized: that a ponderous edifice of convention has been built round the most primitive of sports. There is that formal introduction of the referee (a superannuated bruiser, greeted with cheers), and

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of the combatants; there is the solemn shaking of hands in the ring of two lads who are going to hammer each other's bodies a week hence. And there are the seconds.

It takes at least three men, Malcolm realised, to look after a fighting man in the ring. The boxer fights his round, a man; then he becomes a child. Towels are flicked in the air above his face as whippets are encouraged in the race; fingers are run skilfully over the muscles of the legs and arms, caressing, and the whole torso is raised by a pair of fond arms in order that the breathing may be freed. And water—water is lavished on the darling of the ring. It is squeezed from sponges over his head, soused on his body by the hands of masseurs, drunk by him (and spat out again) from the bottle. If the bout has been specially hard, a second is waiting with a mouthful of water, which is sprayed violently from between the lips into the battered face.

It could be done better and more hygienically with a syringe. But they prefer to do it with the mouth. Half the second's glory would be gone if he stooped to mere mechanics. It is part of this strange, sentimental, primitive game that Malcolm watched so raptly.

The whole affair was strange, unreal, alarming in a sense. It was difficult for Malcolm to bring himself back to the plain fact that all this was



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happening in Glasgow, the Glasgow of Sauchiehall Street and the polite amenities of Arlington Street. It was like going through a shadowy door and finding oneself in a harsh world of primitives.

That sense of strangeness lingered with him to the end. A bell rang, two breathless fighters shook hands hastily, and the brothers pressed to the door. To come out into the dark lane under a starry sky was like making a new discovery, or at least, a rediscovery of normality. The city was the same as ever; and that was surprising. After a spectacle of nakedness, the heavily clothed people in the streets looked odd. A tramway car, sailing past full of light, was an astonishingly friendly thing. Malcolm expected the conductor and his fellow passengers to look at him suspiciously, as at one from a strange land . . . just as he seemed to be looking at them from a new angle. But they didn't. The conductor did not even examine the coins he paid for the tickets.

Thus slowly he came back to the world of everyday. The black streets of the east were left behind, and familiar names were seen above the shops. Soon, as if nothing had happened, he was walking with the crowd at Charing Cross, hearing their easy talk of the trivialities of the day.

"That'll learn ye," said Jock elliptically as they drew near to the friendly doorway in Arlington Street.

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### V

It was not the passing of an occasional night in the company of Mr. Pottie or in that of Jock which seriously perturbed Malcolm. He grudged these hours from his books; it was as if his books were jealous gods, acutely aware of their servant's sins of omission; but he could make up for lost time by working late into the nights of following days. What seemed to him utterly disastrous during his first weeks in Glasgow was Miss Mackenzie's stout insistence on the value of sociability.

It became a secret grievance with Malcolm, this necessity of serving at Miss Mackenzie's domestic shrine. He might have refused to serve, of course; he might have pleaded the claim of work, but he could not and he did not. Such a little piece of social courage was beyond his resources. He was very anxious not to offend anybody by the boorishness he suspected to lurk within himself.

So he came to find that Friday evenings were lost to him. Friday evenings in Arlington Street were devoted to the high service of music. Miss Mackenzie shared with Mrs. Dinwiddie a brother, Peter, who played the fiddle. A widower and a devoted musician, it pleased Peter to pass one evening each week in his sisters' parlour, charming one of them at least (for Mrs. Dinwiddie was beyond the appeal of the violin) with "Il Bacio," "The Choristers' Waltz" and "Melodious Memories

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of Bonnie Scotland." Malcolm learned that he was expected to sit with the company while Peter, tall, red in the nose, and of melancholy aspect, produced melody from an instrument which, held between a long arm and a scrawny neck, seemed absurdly small.

Peter was not always alone as an entertainer. Apparently he regarded his sisters' house as a rehearsal theatre to which he might invite his musical friends. It certainly pleased Miss Mackenzie that he should do so. On his first Friday night in Arlington Street, Malcolm found himself assisting at something like a concert.

Mr. Pottie was there, quizzical and aloof in the best armchair. Matthew sat silent on the sofa behind the table, his eyes stolidly fixed on the piano. Miss Mackenzie, happy mistress of ceremonies, smiled and smirked by the fire, with Mrs. Dinwiddie on a high chair beside her, lost in the fiction page of the evening paper. The atmosphere in the room was portentous somehow, for Peter had brought with him a silent bearded man who handled a flute with fine, nervous fingers, and a short man, almost a dwarf, whom Malcolm understood to be the pianist. He gathered that the three musicians were about to tackle a concerted piece of enormous difficulty and ineffable grandeur.

The lengthy and impressive preliminaries suggested as much. The tiny pianist had difficulty with his music sheet, which kept buckling and fall-

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ing over his hands. Then it was discovered that his legs did not reach the pedals, and Matthew had to stir out of his stolidity to fetch a small chair, almost a stool, from a bedroom. Over some fine point in the reading of an involved passage Peter and the man with the beard argued almost bitterly, pointing to the score with bow and flute. It emerged that the man with the beard had a defective roof to his mouth; his argument sounded metallic and angry.

"Tut, tut, gentlemen!" said Miss Mackenzie archly.

It began at last. Malcolm was startled by a squeak from the pianist. "One-two!"

Then a storm broke. It was as if the musicians were competing rather than co-operating. Malcolm knew in his soul that the result was wrong, hideously wrong, but his mind was reassured by a glance at the pleased face of Miss Mackenzie. This must be, he concluded, what they call Classical Music, but he could hardly conceal from himself the lamentable facts that the fiddle was sharp and the flute spasmodic, and that each of the three performers, renouncing collaboration after the first few bars, was determined to make his own part heard. Louder and louder waxed the din, until it seemed that even Mrs. Dinwiddie must look up from the printed page. Quite unable to find any relationship among the parts, Malcolm glanced timidly at Mr. Pottie. Mr. Pottie winked.

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At last they stopped, the piano and the flute anticipating Peter by at least two bars. Slowly Peter lowered his bow and glared at the man with the beard.

"I told you you were all wrong, Sam."

"I was—*kink*—not," cried the man with the beard.

"You were so," Peter repeated.

"I was—*kink*—not."

"But I tell you, you were!" Peter's voice rose angrily.

"Tut, tut, gentlemen," Miss Mackenzie intervened.

"Well, we'll try it again," said Peter sullenly.

Into the discussion dropped the thin, refined voice of Mr. Pottie.

"Oh, I say! Why not a waltz for a change?"

"Hear, hear!" said Malcolm hoarsely, blushing for his own temerity.

The musicians deferred to the philistines. A waltz was performed, then selections from the minstrelsy of Scotland, then a potpourri of "*Rigoletto*," with Peter's fiddle very dainty in *La donna é mobile* and Miss Mackenzie nodding a coy head in time. But it was plain that Peter's mind harboured a grievance. He spoke seriously.

"Now we'll go back to the big piece. And look here, Sam——"

"I'm—*kink*—all right," said Sam peevishly.

Malcolm observed that Mr. Pottie rose at this

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point and slipped unostentatiously from the room. Oh, for Mr. Pottie's courage! his heart sighed. He had to listen again to the Work, and again to the recriminations of Peter and the man with the beard until Miss Mackenzie rose and spoke hospitably.

"Now just sit down, all of you, till I get a cup of cocoa."

"Have you nothing out of a bottle?" said Peter, heavily jocular.

Miss Mackenzie's reply was not jocular. Malcolm noted particularly that she frowned a little and spoke quickly, a mere mutter.

"Nothing of the sort," she said and hastened from the room.

The cocoa came, great cups of it, heavy and dark; and buns. The company was munching industriously when the door bell clanged from the kitchen.

"That'll be Gracie!" cried Miss Mackenzie rising.

She returned with her arm round the neck of a girl of eighteen, a girl in grey, with the soft fur of the squirrel against fresh cheeks. Her eyes were blue and open, and the hair that coiled from beneath a small hat was fair. She smiled, and it was a kind, cheerful smile that seemed to Malcolm miraculous in this parlour of middle age. It was wonderful to him that the girl could so blithely, so sincerely, kiss the grey cheeks of Mrs. Dinwiddie and smile so confidently on the impassivity of Matthew. He sat over his heavy cup of cocoa and

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watched with appreciative eyes the play of Gracie's mouth when she spoke and the cleanness of her features. It was clear to him that he had never seen a girl quite like her.

It was simply that, by some accident of chance and circumstance, Malcolm made in these few minutes before she went away again with Peter, her father, the discovery of individuality in women that every youth must make. Gracie brought him his first revelation of feminine personality, and for that she was to him unique. His pulse quickened when he reflected that she must be a frequent visitor in Arlington Street.

Peter made a heavy joke about it before they went.

"Oh, it's not your old father you'll be taking home soon," he said. "Here's a fine young man for you."

It was an awful moment for Malcolm. He laughed emptily—then hoped fervently that his laugh would not rule him out of Gracie's sympathy.

"Mr. Tweedie has more to do," she said coolly and held out to Malcolm a grey-gloved hand.

At the moment Malcolm wanted to cry aloud his devotion to her service. In bed that night, however, thinking of her, he turned remorseful and deliberately set himself to the enumeration of the orders in botany.



## CHAPTER IV

### I

Vows of good intention are never so much broken as insidiously undermined. Custom, convenience and habit are the stealthy enemies of endeavour. Nothing less than a cataclysmic Act of God could have driven young Malcolm Tweedie into deliberate renunciation of the austere plan of study he had set for himself. He would have fought and defeated any overt temptation to desert his desk. But the naturalness of his intercourse with Grace Mackenzie blinded him to the fact that, as the months passed, the antique spirit of Love became a more and more serious menace to his studious integrity.

He would have laughed at the idea had it been put to him. He had made his plans, and they were as much a part of his make-up as hunger or thirst or the need to sleep. His plans . . . they were vague as to detail, to be sure, but they were massive and solid in intention. He just wanted to learn, to conquer knowledge, to be master of problems. His way thither lay through graduation in medicine. Then he would go on study-

ing—research, all that sort of thing. Actually he did not face the economic problem. His most practical ambition was to be a Professor, recognised as a person of learning, an authority; and not for the glory of it but for the implied triumph over the stubborn facts that had still to be assimilated.

All this, he reflected dimly, would occupy a considerable period of years. It did not occur to him that circumstances had the power to intervene. Least of all could he have conceived of Love as a trap into which the best of men may stumble.

But there was Gracie—by no means an abstraction: a solid and charming fact. Gracie came into his life as sweetly and inevitably as new leaves come to the trees in spring. He liked Gracie. She was sensible, reliable, and above all else kind; without either pretentiousness or that sense of the theatre he had observed in so many other girls. Because she treated him naturally he was grateful, and he came to look more and more hungrily for her companionship. Gracie was kind; Gracie had about her a sweetness. And it was good to look on her cheerful little face and her trim body.

They usually met on Friday evenings. These encounters were never dramatic, for Miss Mackenzie was not the woman to let her musical evenings languish. Friday, after all, was Mr. Peter Mackenzie's evening, and but for the charm his fiddle held for his sister, Gracie might not have been there at all. But how the presence of the girl cheered these

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evenings for Malcolm! He came to look forward eagerly to Friday. When Miss Mackenzie rose about ten to brew the inevitable cocoa, Malcolm was ever alert to establish his claim to the chair next to that which bore the seven stone ten of Gracie. Often, while their elders gossiped at large, they snatched minutes from life for private conversation.

Malcolm was by no means a talker of brilliance. The persiflage he believed to be proper to intercourse with girls was quite beyond him. The peculiar glory of talking to Gracie, however, was that you did not need to be witty. You could talk about the things that interested yourself, and she would nod her fair head and be thoroughly appreciative. Only in her company did Malcolm escape the self-consciousness of inadequacy that hampered him in intercourse with others.

Thus he proceeded to make some extremely gratifying discoveries of tastes and views mutually shared. Gracie agreed with him that compulsory Latin for the Prelim. was a farce; that the Rectorial Elections ought not to be fought on political lines—"Get a really good man, like Einstein," was Malcolm's view—and Gracie nodded; and that there were too many women in medicine. They decided too, that threepence was far too much for a cup of coffee in a tea room, and that jazz music was being considerably overdone. About dancing they differed, however. It transpired that Gracie

loved dancing, whereas Malcolm had never so much as learned the polka step.

Over that calamitous thought he brooded for an hour in bed one Friday night. He was genuinely ashamed of himself; the social defect seemed to him then enormous. At his next meeting with Gracie he led their private talk back to the subject.

"I would really like to learn," he declared earnestly. "Do you know if these classes are any good?"

"Dear me, I'll teach you myself in half an hour," cried Gracie. "We'll get auntie to clear away the table one night. Auntie——"

Malcolm was glad that Miss Mackenzie, busy with a strange visitor, said, "Just a minute, Gracie," and that the moment passed. But his mind filled with dark, ecstatic thoughts. To be held by Gracie's strong young arms, to be her slave; perhaps to feel the touch of her fair, fragrant hair on his cheek!

Then it happened one night that he had to see Gracie home. She had come to Arlington Street alone, and Matthew was in bed nursing a cold with characteristic dourness. When Gracie rose to go at length, Malcolm was able to compass a natural offer of protection.

"I'll see you home," he said.

"Oh, thank you! How nice!" said Gracie easily.

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To think that such terrific enterprises could be managed so simply!

They had not far to go together. The Mackenzies lived just round the corner in St. George's Road. It was in Malcolm's mind that a quiet walk up Woodlands Road to the West End Park might tactfully be suggested, but he quailed before the suggestion of third-rate gallantry that might be read into the proposal. He did contrive that they should linger together before the still-lighted window of a furniture store, and they paused for two minutes at the corner while Malcolm pointed out to Gracie the odd fact that an incandescent gas lamp of ancient pattern still stands among the blazing electric light standards of Charing Cross. That was the sort of fact that interested him. Nevertheless, the passage from door to door seemed to him to be accomplished with exasperating rapidity.

They paused on the steps leading up from the pavement to the close of the high, red sandstone tenement in which Mr. Mackenzie, out of his salary as collector in the Corporation Gas Department, contrived to maintain a flat of three rooms and kitchen. Malcolm saw with alarm that Gracie proposed to vanish at once; and doggedly he set himself in a conversational attitude. But there was so little to say. All hopes of intimacy were shattered by the imminent diversions of the street: the humming tramcars, the loiterers along the pave-

ments, a noisy group of young men and women in the porch of a closed shop opposite.

"Well I must run up," said Gracie. "See you soon again."

Her air of casualness brought over Malcolm a wave of self-pity.

"How soon?" he plunged desperately.

"Oh, sometime soon," she said carelessly.

"But Gracie. . . ." He swallowed a lump of nervousness. "Gracie, will you come to the pictures with me some night?"

"Of course I will. When?"

It was as easy as that! He galloped on.

"What about Wednesday?"

"Wednesday. . . . Right O. Good night, Malcolm."

"Good night, Gracie," he said wistfully.

The capacity for logical thinking returned to him on his short way home. So he had blundered into the sacrifice of a Wednesday night. A *Wednesday* night—when he ought to be working! The reflection was uncomfortable, a canker in his simple mind. It was bad enough to have to give up Friday nights. For a moment he saw laziness and failure black before him. Then the thought of Gracie's sweetness brought back to him the desperation of the moment in which he had made his rash proposal.

"Oh, to hang!" he muttered heroically.

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### II

The button on Mr. Mackenzie's door bore the polite invitation, "Press," not the vulgar "Push" of lower parts, but Malcolm paused nervously before he obeyed the injunction. For this was his first large adventure in gallantry. It was all very well to meet a girl at the corner, but it was another affair altogether to call for her at her home and enter her family circle as an accepted man of the world. Malcolm, moreover, was not at all easy in his mind about the probable attitude of Mr. Mackenzie. Peter, he had observed, was apt to be erratic in temper. His touch on the button might have been a suicidal tremble on a hair trigger.

Gracie herself answered his ring. She wore a little grey hat, but she was still coatless. Malcolm had hoped that she might be ready to join him at once.

"Come and speak to father for a minute while I get on my coat and things," she said.

Malcolm was ushered into a sitting room of which the air was thick with the smoke of a strong tobacco. Mr. Mackenzie did not rise to greet his guest, but pointed to an empty chair which Malcolm took with the gaucherie of a culprit. He was aware at once that Mr. Mackenzie's evening mood was distinctly morose.

"You two going to the pictures, I'm told," was his host's grim greeting.



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"Yes," replied Malcolm modestly.

"Can't see what fun you get out of them," Mr. Mackenzie observed.

"Oh, I don't know," Malcolm began.

"Neither do I," said Mr. Mackenzie.

He turned to his pipe and puffed at it almost fiercely. When it was drawing to his satisfaction, he leaned back in his rocking chair and gazed at the ceiling through dull, watery eyes. Malcolm's discomfort increased. As usual, he laid the blame for this social failure at his own door. His lowered eyes were on the dull fire in the grate. Brooding thus, he was startled by another remark from his host.

"You coming out for a doctor?"

"That's the idea," said Malcolm, attempting brightness.

"Too many doctors already, that's my opinion," said Mr. Mackenzie.

"Oh, I don't know," Malcolm protested.

"But I do," insisted Mr. Mackenzie.

No doubt the conversation would have hung fire again had not Gracie then entered the room.

"I'm ready then, Malcolm," she said cheerfully.

Malcolm rose gladly. He felt that he ought to shake hands with his host, but Peter's attitude was forbidding. Already Gracie had reached the door and, after a moment's hesitation, he followed her. Their going was sped by a grudging caution from Mr. Mackenzie.

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"See you two and don't be late."

"Don't worry," responded Gracie lightly.

Even then it struck Malcolm that the relations between father and daughter were hardly of the natural cordiality, but the thought passed from him when he found himself following Gracie down the stairs. It was plain that Gracie was pleased to be going out with him. There was merry anticipation in her blue eyes, and she rubbed her cheeks ecstatically in the soft squirrel fur about her neck.

"Where are we going, then?" she asked.

"I thought of that place in Byres Road. There's a new Fairbanks on there, you know."

"Oh!" said Gracie.

She had cause to exclaim. There are at least six handsome cinema houses nearer to Charing Cross than Byres Road. Douglas Fairbanks—that was a palpable sophistry. The quality of the picture was not to matter greatly to those two on this first night alone together. Gracie knew very well in her feminine mind how the male was scheming. Byres Road lies beyond the West End Park from Charing Cross, and there might be time to walk home among the trees and shrubbery in that fair corner of the Kelvin Valley. She did not, however, raise any objection.

They went by tramcar and took seats at one-and-threepence each in the balcony. Malcolm had planned it all with elaborate care. At the proper moment he produced from his coat pocket a half-

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pound box of chocolates bought in Sauchiehall Street that afternoon at the ruinous price of two shillings. Gracie exclaimed at his extravagance. She sat and munched, while Malcolm puffed gallantly at one from a packet of those Gold Flake cigarettes he was learning to smoke. They were perfectly happy to be together thus.

It was about nine o'clock that Malcolm's impatience to be alone with her overcame him.

"What about shifting now?" he asked with a fine assumption of the casual.

The film of the evening was not yet finished, but Gracie proceeded at once to gather her belongings together. Downstairs, they were tempted by the orange lights of a restaurant and the shimmer of a soda fountain. Recklessly Malcolm ordered for Gracie an orange sunset sundae and for himself a less pretentious mint julep. Thus fortified, they passed out into the cold of the winter night and looked down and up the busy street.

"Do you see our car?" asked Gracie.

"What about walking?" said Malcolm grandly, as if the thought had just then occurred to him. "We could go over University Avenue and through the Park."

"Have we time?"

"Heaps! And it's a rare night."

A full moon rode high among light clouds above the roofs. A nor'-westerly wind with a nip in it blew from the Fintrys, and the pavements were

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stippled with sparkling shields of hoar frost. It was a night to be out in, a night for walking, a night for the warm, winter confidences of lovers. The moonlight had taken from the streets the sombre and oppressive mysteries of the normal winter night in Glasgow; it seemed that the orange glow from the windows of the houses had no right to compete with the silvery candour of the open air. Buildings—tenements, churches, and the Gothic mass of the University—took on in this white, unearthly light a new and striking dignity.

It was not long before the boy and girl, passing over the crest of Gilmorehill towards the Park, forgot altogether the self-consciousness of callow sentiment. Each was deeply interesting to the other, and they forgot the trivialities of formal courtship in the mere joy of talking of the things that concerned them—of Malcolm's classes, of summer holidays, of plans for the great business of living. Malcolm expanded on his ambitions, on his passion to know, on the dim and splendid chance of that professorship. Gracie spoke of a simple girl's little dreams, of a really nice house and smart maids, and mats on a mahogany table. White tablecloths were all very well, but the mats were smart, and there was the laundry to consider. A little tremulously, self-consciousness returning for a moment, they agreed that the celibate of either sex was by no means completely happy.

So they passed slowly down the hill into the Park

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and paused for a while, leaning on the coping of the bridge over the Kelvin. That much-polluted stream was impressive under the moon, smooth and silvery, with long, quivering streaks of gold from the lamps on its surface. Malcolm called the attention of Gracie to the sinister glug of the current under the arches of the bridge, and she clasped his arm. It disappointed him that she relaxed her grip when they started uphill through the shrubbery towards the rampart of Park Circus.

They sauntered up those dark avenues, indifferent in their own happiness to the close-gathered, whispering couples on the seats. At one steep incline Malcolm stretched out a hand to help his companion up the hill; she took it in her warm fingers, and they laughed their way to the top. At last, on a seat beneath the dominating statue of Earl Roberts, they threw themselves down in mock exhaustion.

"Don't talk to me," said Gracie, panting. "I must get my breath."

From the point where they sat the view was fine enough to hold them silent. The University stood out with splendour against the western sky, the trifling detail of its Victorian architecture lost in the silhouette of the night. Half a city was before them, glowing to the distant base of the Renfrewshire hills. A high, moving light marked the passage of an outward-bound ship down the River.

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Malcolm saw all this with an intensity of vision he had never known before. To-night it was wondrously significant; he could feel himself and Gracie bound up and fused with the life of the world.

"Isn't it wonderful!" he whispered, looking straight before him with youth's visionary eyes.

There was no answer from Gracie. He looked round and saw that a tiny handkerchief was crushed into a ball in her hand. Her eyes were forlorn, and a tear on her cheek glistened in the moonshine.

"Gracie! What's wrong? Gracie . . ."

He was frightened, heartbroken. She turned to him her miserable face, wet with her tears. There was on it the momentary ugliness of despair. While their eyes met she sobbed, frankly, heart-rendingly. Her confession of grief in his presence was complete. And in that warped face he saw, in his pity, a bewildering pathetic beauty.

"Oh, Gracie!" he cried, near to tears himself: "Please, Gracie . . ."

He caught at her wrist and his fingers slipped between glove and sleeve, so that the soft warmth of her arm met his touch. The swift and splendid sensation carried intoxication to his young head.

"My Gracie!" he wailed. "My own wee Gracie!"

He pulled her head towards his breast and, following blindly a simple instinct, lowered his lips to her face. They touched her, and the touch was ecstatically sweet, but he came back suddenly to

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self-consciousness when he realised that it was on the point of the chin he had kissed her. Just as instinctively as he had moved to comfort her, Gracie had drawn back her head.

There was something painful about that failure to catch her full on the lips. He had blundered, and the rare moment had passed, a moment of potential splendour that could never return. Almost contritely he heard the gasp of her modesty.

"Don't, Malcolm! Oh, please . . ."

She rose to her feet. Now, surprisingly, she smiled down on him.

"Don't worry, Malcolm. Please. Girls are silly things. Come along, we must get back."

He could not, during their walk home, reconcile the normal girl by his side with the frightened little thing he had seen in tears on a bench in the Park.

### III

Gracie's composure during that walk home was, indeed, a thing to marvel at. Along the commanding terrace of Park Circus they went with the moon high above them, and Gracie spoke to Malcolm, if not maternally, at all events in the manner of an elder sister. It was as if she were recoiling from the abyss of emotion that had opened before them, for such a short, sweet moment, in the West End Park.



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Her voice was low but firm, and her eyes were steady before her.

"You've got your work to do, Malcolm," she said, "and I've got things of my own to attend to. We're only eighteen, Malcolm, and there's plenty of time. Promise me you'll not—you'll not do that again."

"Do what?" He was determined to be stubborn.

"You know what."

"I don't know what."

A note of anger crept into his voice. His callow heart was genuinely hurt by her swift turn from the dear intimacies of her passing weakness.

"Surely we're not going to quarrel, Malcolm," she pleaded.

"No," he had to admit.

"Surely not." She paused, as it were wistfully. Then she whispered rapidly. "You're not to try to kiss me again, Malcolm. Promise—please."

"Oh, but Gracie . . ."

She stopped and, seizing his wrist, made him turn unwillingly to face her. The light of a street lamp caught the straying wisps of her fair hair.

"Promise me, Malcolm."

He looked over her shoulder down the street.

"No. Promise me. I mean it," she insisted, resenting his evasion.

"It's such a long time," he said.

"It'll pass quickly, Malcolm. You have to work.

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How can we—how can we hope for anything if you don't work?"

"I dare say you are right," he admitted.

"You know I'm right. Then promise——"

"All right, Gracie," he said. "I promise."

He seized her gloved hand. It came over him that he must kiss it. But she snatched it away and turned to walk on.

"No, you promised," she gasped.

"It was only your hand," said Malcolm pathetically. He felt very strongly that his great renunciation merited a dramatic acknowledgment. From that moment dated his faint but disconcerting awareness of the absence in Gracie's sturdy make-up of a sense of romantic form.

### IV

Most earnestly he took to heart her recommendation. Gracie was right: he must work if only for Gracie's sake. Perfervidly he threw himself again at the forces of ignorance before him, poring over his books at night till his eyes swam and the fair type of Cunningham's "Anatomy" vanished as by black magic into the dead white page. He had headaches on most nights of the week, and he slept ill. In his class examinations he took high marks. Demonstrators were always willing to spend time over the work of one so manifestly competent.

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Malcolm became, indeed, a sort of unofficial demonstrator in his year. Often the official assistants, maddened and delayed by the obtuseness of average youth, would pass over to him a grave but thick-witted lad from the Highlands or some unhappy girl too nervous to use her brain in the business of dissection. Malcolm loved these tasks. To demonstrate and explain pleased not only his vanity, but also his passion for clear thinking in the realms of knowledge. He was a teacher born.

It was thus that there came into his life the disconcerting personality of Miss Ramadea Warrupitam. Bending one afternoon over a nice dissection of the human ear, he felt the fall of a hand on his shoulder and turned to see on the face of Andrews, the senior demonstrator, the weary look of a man who has given up a problem as a bad job.

"I say, Tweedie," said Andrews wearily, "trot over like a good man and show that nigger girl over there how to tell the vagus nerve from the subclavian artery."

Malcolm looked across the room and saw, smiling effusively at him from behind a distant table, the amiable face of a dark young woman. Miss Warrupitam was assuredly not a negress of the pure blood. Her black hair had the authentic curl, she was heavy and short in the neck and thick about the lips, but the colour of her skin suggested that she had her share of European blood. It was

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as if Miss Warrupitam, despite her tropical name, had a near relation who had discharged a debt of sentiment by sending the child of miscegenation to the *alma mater* of the north.

Malcolm found that Miss Warrupitam's English was excellent, even volatile, despite a peculiar hissing quality in its production. Vividly, as if it were a joke, she described the completeness of her defeat by this problem of dissection. Malcolm observed to himself, not for the first time, that the female sense of responsibility towards learning is weak, but the smile did not die from the olive face when he poised the knife between his fingers and bent down over the gaping thorax of what had once been a woman.

"Look here," he said, "there's the *œsophagus*. Got that?"

His exposition was a model of clarity. He conducted Miss Warrupitam up and down the branches of the vagus nerve from its roots in the brain to its terminus in the stomach. It was much more than he had been called upon to do, but the inveterate habit of study took him in its grip. He dealt with the vagus nerve till it had no secrets left to hold.

"There you are, then," he said finally.

Looking up, he found the eyes of Miss Warrupitam upon him. There was that in those eyes which disconcerted him. Clearly the demonstration had passed over the head of Miss Warrupitam; clearly

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her dark instincts of femininity were concentrated on him, Malcolm.

"You're very clever, little boy," said Miss Warrupitam.

Malcolm laughed and immediately realised that they were alone in the dissecting room, save for an assistant writing at a distant table and a porter engaged in the melancholy business of sheeting the bodies for the night.

"We ought to be going," said Malcolm hastily. "Good night."

"You leave me then?" the plaintively playful voice of Miss Warrupitam followed him, but he pretended not to hear it. It was not the dark skin of Miss Warrupitam that frightened him, but the unfathomable mind behind her lascivious eyes.

Malcolm had, however, forgotten the dark girl when he resumed next afternoon his investigations into the complicated structure of the human ear, and it annoyed him exceedingly when he looked up for a moment to see that broad face grinning at him across the cadaver on which he was working. Miss Warrupitam had plainly sought him out among the host of students.

"Come and help me again, clever boy," she cooed to him. "That old thorax will drive me mad."

"But I can't," Malcolm objected. "Speak to Mr. Andrews."

"He is busy—all the demonstrators are busy. You come."

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"What's the trouble?"

"That old vagus nerve. I've lost him again. You come, if you please."

"Well, just a minute then. I'm busy."

Frowning, he hurried with Miss Warrupitam towards the sad, scarred remnant of a corpse that was the chopping block of her blundering dissections. Into a cavity he thrust the point of his knife and drew out a loop of pale, white stuff.

"There's your nerve," he said contemptuously. "Surely that's not difficult."

"But it loses itself in the head there. I cannot follow it."

"Oh, but surely . . ."

Again he bent down and laid bare the track of the nerve.

"Well, there you are, just as I told you yesterday."

"But into the stomach. I cannot follow him there."

It did not occur to Malcolm that he was being fooled by a very inexperienced performer in the art of coquetry. He saw simply a case of inability to understand, and he could not rest in the presence of ignorance without striving in his earnest way to enlighten it. Thus he gave another half hour to Miss Warrupitam and earned a viscous, yearning look of gratitude from her large eyes.

"You are kind," she said richly, "so very kind."

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"Not at all," said Malcolm, and hurried back to his own task.

Leaving the building that evening, when the greenish dusk of a fine winter evening was falling in the grey quadrangle, he became aware that his passage through the darkling cloisters was not unaccompanied. Light feet hurried after him over the flags, and at once, intuitively, he knew his fate. Miss Warrupitam would not suffer him to be alone.

She was breathless, talkative, pathetically eager in her primitive chase. Whatever strain of European blood her veins may have carried, it had not conferred on her any self-consciousness of either sex or colour. Her purpose, frankly stated, was to persuade Malcolm that he should come as her partner to a dance that evening in the hostel where she lived.

"It will be a lovely dance. Every girl will bring her own man. You will be mine," she said, and added briskly: "I will give you a good time."

"But I can't," protested Malcolm. "I'm going to another party."

It was strictly true. There was to be that evening, in the house of Peter Mackenzie, a party at which the entire Arlington Street contingent was to attend. Malcolm had not declined the chance of seeing Gracie.

"But you will put that off," said Miss Warrupitam.



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"But I can't," repeated Malcolm.

"But you must," declared Miss Warrupitam.

They reached the corner of University Avenue where they must part. Malcolm prepared to make a calm exit.

"Well, it's very good of you," he said, "but I'm sorry. And now I'll have to get along."

"You will not come?" cried Miss Warrupitam.

"I'm afraid I can't."

He was alarmed then by the look that came into her eyes—the frightened look of the subject race. Her brown hand came forward to grasp his sleeve.

"Please come! I am so lonely."

Somehow he hated in a woman that simple confession. Violently he shook his head.

"No, I can't," he said hastily, "and that's all about it."

Abruptly she turned from him and walked away up the hill. On his homeward journey across the Park there remained with him uncomfortably a pathetic picture of a primitive child repulsed, ambling home to her loneliness.

### v

Mr. Peter Mackenzie's party, so far as the guests and the nature of the entertainment were concerned, was very much like any Friday evening party in Arlington Street. Mr. Pottie, to be sure, had contrived to excuse himself, but all the other

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familiar faces were there and only one that was new to Malcolm—the rather hard and very generously powdered face of a lady whose name, he gathered, was Mrs. Grigor. It transpired that Mrs. Grigor and Mr. Mackenzie were on terms of familiarity, she calling him Peter and he addressing her frankly as Nellie. Malcolm observed that the attitude of Miss Mackenzie and Gracie towards this strange woman was hardly so cordial. Mrs. Grigor, they said, and that rather icily; they were polite but distant.

Malcolm was in a mood to be observant of these relationships, for he was sensitized by a private unhappiness. Gracie's manner towards him on arrival had been cold. By accident they had been left alone together in the hall, and he had whispered to her some confidential trifle. To that she had replied in a tone that was not merely casual, but actually loud, as if she wished to advertise to the world her indifference to him. It was a momentary thing, but it hurt.

In the crowded sitting room she steadily avoided his despairing glances. He had failed this evening to secure the chair by her side, and he saw that she addressed herself deliberately to the extremely difficult and thankless task of entertaining Mrs. Dinwiddie with gossip. He felt marooned, ignobly flouted. What had he done, he wondered? What private calamity had overtaken Gracie that she

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should have changed so suddenly her attitude towards him?

It was for Malcolm a miserable evening. His place in the circle was next to Matthew, and from that quarter no distraction could be expected. The repertoire of Mr. Mackenzie and his friends he had heard too often; even the quarrels of Peter and the flautist took no novel turn. Their ambitious concerted piece they played as execrably as ever. And in the pauses, the party split into two conversational groups—Mrs. Grigor and the musicians, with Mrs. Grigor very arch and young among them; and Gracie and her aunts. Malcolm and Matthew were left outside, and between these two there could be not even a parody of defensive intercourse.

A miserable evening. Gracie looked her best, too, sweet and tender in a little dress of black with sprays of white, like blossoms, at her throat and wrists. It was nearly intolerable to Malcolm that he could be shut out from the sympathy of one so lovely and dear. It was in him to rise and shout a ribald protest against the farce of polite sociability.

What exasperated him most of all was that the others, Matthew excepted, appeared to be enjoying themselves. Aunts and niece made a cosy conversational group, with Gracie on a hassock between them as its nexus. Mrs. Grigor, sharing the sofa with Peter, was clearly delighted with her conquest of the older men. Mr. Mackenzie was in his ele-

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ment. His habitual moroseness had departed for the nonce, and he stood forth as a jester. His jokes were somewhat rough and ambiguous, and he glanced sideways at Mrs. Grigor when he uttered them, but the lady approved them all. Her laughter offended Malcolm, for it was loud and hard.

It was halfway through the evening that the party began to develop on disconcerting lines. Having flourished his way through *La donna é mobile*, Mr. Mackenzie laid his fiddle on the table, nodded his head towards the door, and spoke recklessly to his fellow musicians.

"And now, boys, what about a refresher?"

The small pianist smiled, and the bearded flautist uttered a metallic noise. Their shuffle towards the door was self-conscious, and they sought to jest as they went. The women remained silent. Malcolm saw on the face of Miss Mackenzie a frown; he saw that Gracie stared into the fire with sad, wondering eyes. But they broke out into a gust of talking when there came through the wall from the room next door the tinkle of glass on glass and the hoarse hissing of a syphon.

These visits to the room next door increased in frequency as the night went on. From Peter there departed eventually the last trace of gruffness, and he passed even from geniality to obstreperousness. He had to sing, and his song derived from the music hall of the 'nineties. He proposed in a hearty way that they should dance, and when the

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proposal was refused by his relatives, Peter upbraided them for dullness.

"Ye're a poor blooming lot anyway," he said roughly. From his disappointing relations he turned to Mrs. Grigor. "You give us a dance, Nellie," was his idea. "Up on the table with you and show's a bit of leg."

Mrs. Grigor laughed loudly. She had accompanied the musicians on their last two visits to the room next door. They did not hear the shocked cry from Miss Mackenzie.

"Peter! Peter!"

They did not observe that Gracie rose suddenly from the hassock and hurried from the room. As for Malcolm, he was shocked and frightened. He began to understand the mystery of the relationship between Gracie and her father. He seemed to know at last why, so suddenly, she had burst into tears in the moonlight in the West End Park. It became his burning desire to take himself away from this painful scene of domestic shame.

His tacit wish was gratified at once by Miss Mackenzie.

"Would you go and help Gracie with the supper things, Malcolm?" she said tactfully.

Gladly he rose and hastened to the kitchen to find Gracie filling a kettle at the sink.

"Can I help you, Gracie?" he asked.

"There's nothing to do," she said.

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He looked at her curiously and saw indifference to him in her averted glance. Gracie . . . He wanted to cry to her an appeal for candour, and found himself dumb. Carefully she laid the kettle on the gas stove and went to the mantelpiece for matches. Stretching for the box, she spoke casually.

"Who's your black friend?"

"My black friend!" he repeated, genuinely puzzled. "Oh, that . . ."

"The girl in University Avenue this afternoon. Do you like having your hand held by a nigger?"

The silly, feminine injustice of the thing stung him. Even Gracie could blunder—it angered him that she could.

"You're being silly," he said.

"I'm not being silly." She lit the gas with a plop, having broken three matches in her trembling fingers. "In any case, I don't care."

"Why mention it, then?" he asked.

"Oh, polite conversation . . ."

She walked away from his gaze to a pile of sandwiches on a plate, and dully he watched her. There contended within him genuine impulses to laugh and to cry. This silliness! This was the sort of thing women went in for: endless pettiness, trivialities forever coming between a man and his job. For a moment, the gay spirit of freedom beckoned to him. But he could not himself rise above the mere humanities. He spoke harshly.

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"You're not going to make a fool of me because another girl tried to. She chased me, just because she had to have a partner for a dance to-night. I wouldn't go—I wouldn't have gone in any case—but I specially didn't go because I wanted to see you. And now . . . Oh Gracie!"

He melted quickly. He could not bear for long to be out of her sympathy. His eyes begged a favour of her, and now she looked at him steadily.

The tension was snapped by the opening of the dining-room door. Mrs. Grigor laughed outside. There arose the voice of Peter addressing his sister.

"Away with you, Agnes! You're a proper wet blanket. We're going to have a wee dram if we want one. . . ."

The bedroom door closed. Malcolm stared helplessly at Gracie. He saw her features convulse. She sank onto a chair. And then she was sobbing before him, her head on the scrubbed deal of the kitchen table.

"Oh, it's awful! It's awful," she wept.

The spectacle appalled him. He felt that this domestic crisis was hopelessly complex. They would be waiting for supper next door; they would hear her crying.

"Gracie! Gracie!" he whispered.

Under her arms he put his hands and sought to raise her up, but he could not move her. She was bound in her grief to that position of abandonment.



## YOUNG MALCOLM

In a frenzy of anxiety he bent over her till his lips were on her hair. The touch of it was intoxicating.

"Gracie! Gracie, dear!" he whispered intensely, "O Gracie, don't cry! Please, Gracie . . ."

His head slipped lower till his lips were at her ear and he could feel on his cheeks the warmth of hers.

"Gracie, Gracie! I love you, dear," he repeated. "I love you. . . . Please!"

He felt then a clutch at his right hand; he felt it drawn beneath her bent face, felt her tears on it and the warm pressure of her lips.

"O Gracie!" he murmured.

A cheerful stammering from the gas stove broke in on their raptures.

"The kettle!" cried Gracie.

Malcolm sprang away from her and turned down the gas. He wheeled round to find Gracie beside him. She dabbed at her eyes with a scrap of cambric, but she was smiling.

"We'll have to hurry with the supper," she said quickly. "Wait till I give myself a dab of powder."

Carefully they busied themselves with cups and plates. When the tray was piled at last and Malcolm stood with it in his hands, Gracie paused at the door.

"Malcolm!" she began and hesitated. "You remember . . . what you promised, Malcolm?"

"Yes, Gracie?"

## *YOUNG MALCOLM*

"You'll promise to keep it, even . . . even after to-night?"

"All right, Gracie," he said reluctantly.

"Please, Malcolm."

Piously he swore to himself that he would work like a slave for her, for Gracie.

## CHAPTER V

### I

WITH the whistle screaming, the 8:30 from Glasgow thundered out of the tunnel at Bishopton and raced along the flat by the shores of the River. It passed out of the darkness and smoke into the golden light of a June evening. Across the river the Lennox hills, gilded by a sun near to its setting behind the mountains of Cowal, heaved their shoulders above the cloud of blue smoke from the evening fires of Bowling and Dumbuck. Down the ship channel and past the great rock of Dumbarton went a liner, outward bound for the east. Through the window of the carriage in which Malcolm sat alone came the tang of salt air from the Firth.

The evening's glory consorted perfectly with his mood. Things had happened that day to make him vastly happy. For an hour that morning he had loitered with his kind in the University quadrangle, waiting for the examination lists to go up. He was backward in the rush when they did appear, but a more muscular friend had shouted good news to him from the heart of the press.

"Passed the lot as usual, you bloody swot! And a distinction in Medical Ju., if you please."

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Malcolm did not wait to confirm the news, but hurried off to pack up in Arlington Street and say good-bye to Miss Mackenzie. He was to meet Gracie at lunch—though it was dinner to them—in Sauchiehall Street at a quarter to one. The lunch was to be the climax of elaborate preparation on Malcolm's part; it had been the cause of meticulous parsimony over a period of three weeks. He felt that it must be a momentous meeting. For all his modesty he had known in his heart that he would be able to announce to Gracie over the table that he had passed the Fourth Professional and was on the eve of facing the Final, the culmination of his endeavour and the end to their waiting.

They broke bread in Winston's, having chosen, under the contemptuous eyes of a smart young waitress, to go through with the one-and-nine-penny luncheon of the house. Thus they had tomato soup, roast beef with roast potatoes and apple tart. Rising to the splendour of the occasion, Malcolm ordered two bottles of ginger ale and cups of white coffee to follow the sweet—a reckless addition to the bill, duly commented on by Gracie, of one and fourpence.

But it was worth it. Their talk was happy. He saw the proud affection in Gracie's eyes and embarked on that encouragement on a large statement of his ambitions. Gracie listened eagerly. Then she contributed her meed of delight by telling Malcolm of a plan of hers. Miss Mackenzie, it ap-

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peared, had taken for the month of July the cottage of a relative in the wilds of Argyll. Gracie was to be with her and Mrs. Dinwiddie throughout their stay. There was yet a spare room, but Matthew could join them only for a fortnight. It was Gracie's glorious intention that Miss Mackenzie should have Malcolm as her guest for at least a week.

"My gum!" exclaimed Malcolm, gazing happily into Gracie's eyes. "But that would be great!"

"Wouldn't it?" cried Gracie. "Heavenly!"

Heavenly. They painted in anticipation a colourful picture of summer days together in the Highlands. So unspeakably beautiful was it that Malcolm felt moved to make an appropriately virtuous vow of hard work during the remainder of the vacation. He would work every day.

"The Final next spring, you know," he said, looking eloquently into Gracie's eyes.

"Yes, Malcolm," she said gravely, "you've got to work."

It was after three before, to the frankly expressed relief of the waitress, they rose and went into the hot street. They took a tramcar to Anniesland and walked the straight miles of the Great Western Road back to town. Ices in a shop in Byres Road—another shilling gone; then tea in the morose company of Mr. Peter Mackenzie. They were happy every minute of the afternoon until, waving from the carriage window, he saw her figure dwindle to noth-

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ing on the receding Platform Thirteen of the Central Station. She was to write: often.

Now, at ease in the train for home, the day's happiness lingered with him. It had been a day of high wonder for him, and its glory was not yet departed. His eyes towards the golden glory of the hills and the sea, he looked forward now to the proud joy of his mother. She was to hear his great news; that easy pass in the Fourth Professional, that Distinction in Medical Jurisprudence. The good, kind mother at home, accustomed now to the academic triumphs of her son, had never failed to salute one with the same tearful joy that had brought the broken, "Sonny boy! Sonny boy!" to her lips in the vestibule of the Temperance Institute. And Malcolm thought kindly, and a little sadly, of the grave satisfaction that would shine in his father's face and of his shy, "Well done, lad."

And there was more than that. The long afternoon with Gracie had given him the courage of that affection. He felt in himself a new sense of responsibility; he was aware of a mature need to regularise the situation. His mother must be told about Gracie. It might even be that his mother and Gracie must be brought face to face in the course of the summer, his two heroines. After all, he was past twenty and nearing the Final. And, in any event, the week in Argyllshire had to be explained. With a precocious sense of their gravity, Malcolm

## YOUNG MALCOLM

looked forward to discussing these high affairs with his mother.

He jumped up when the train swung over the points before the Central Station. He should have gone on to the West Station, five minutes' walk from the home in Mountjoy Street. But the night was beautiful, and he wanted to fondle for a time his beautiful anticipations. By a tortuous process of reasoning he reached the conclusion that he ought to go up and see in the twilight the great War Memorial, newly erected in the Central Park.

### II

It was still light outside when Malcolm knocked at last at his father's door, but it was dark on the landing and he could barely see his mother's face when she opened to him.

"Sonny!" she cried, greeting him. He bent down to kiss her, and she clung to him.

Just that word and that embrace, and Malcolm knew that something was wrong at home. The tone of her voice had not in it the perfect note of happiness at his return; her arm was held round his neck more tightly than usual. He looked keenly into her face.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"O Malcolm!" It was nearly a wail. Then, pulling herself together, his mother reached out her hand for his case. "Come in, son, and see your



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father. We've had a bit of bad news to-day. Your poor father . . ."

"Is he ill?"

"No. In you go and see him."

His heart at his mouth, Malcolm passed into the kitchen. There sat his father in the big chair, puffing as usual at his pipe. But the boy observed that the gas had not been lit, that the evening paper lay apparently unread on the table. He saw, too, that his father's reaction to his greeting was slow, that seconds passed before the brooding eyes moved from the fire to his own face.

"Well, son. Back again?"

A normal greeting from his father, but the tone was dead.

"Back for another three months," said Malcolm automatically.

He sat down. There was nothing else to do. It seemed that he could not say anything to his father, so lost in a sad preoccupation. His mother came in.

"You'll want some supper, Malcolm."

"No, thanks," he said. "I'm not hungry. I had something in Glasgow."

On another night his mother would have insisted, but now she did not press him. Silence came upon the group. The cries of children at play in the street below invaded the room, but desolation and silent discomfort had their way with father and mother and son. To Malcolm it was intolerable—after a day of happiness. He burned to know the truth,

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whatever it might be, yet he could not hurt these two dear people by asking. He stared through the window at the dull Venetian blinds of the house opposite.

The silence was broken at length by his father, speaking slowly.

"There's bad news for you, son, I'm afraid. Bad news . . ." He knocked out his pipe on the fender.

"That fellow, Jock . . ."

There was a pause.

"What has he done?" asked Malcolm.

"What has he done! Got himself into trouble, I fear. A girl. The old story . . ."

"Oh!" said Malcolm.

Mr. Tweedie seemed to lose himself in a painful reverie, and Malcolm had to help him through by the assumption of a casual manner.

"Who is it?" he asked. "Anybody we know?"

"Yes. John Duff's lass—her that works in the tobacco shop at the West Station; Annie Duff. Poor lassie!"

"She's a besom!" The sharp interjection came surprisingly from Mrs. Tweedie, and her husband held up a patient hand.

"Now, now, Nance!" he protested. "Ye can't say that. They're young, the pair of them." He re-addressed himself to Malcolm. "They'll have to get married. There's got to be a reckoning with John Duff about his girl."

"I see," said Malcolm emptily.

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There was nothing to see, no subtlety, no romance. Just an old sordid story of folly. It was dunderheads like Jock who invariably created these bleak situations, and Malcolm did not find himself surprised. He longed to go to his old father, suffering but patient, and tell him not to worry, not to worry. Passionately he desired to go to his mother, weeping softly, and kiss away her tears and promise her happiness. But he could not do these things; Jock had brought a chill and a paralysis on the house in Mountjoy Street.

Malcolm rose to his feet.

"I'll go to bed," he said.

A glorious home-coming, he thought bitterly as he moved to the door. Immediately there came over him a wave of anger against Jock and all the fools in the world. He turned to his parents and spoke almost savagely.

"I got the Fourth Professional results to-day. I'm through all right."

"Well done, lad," said his father.

Nothing from his mother. Nothing! Jealousy pierced Malcolm's mind like a knife. This was Jock and his clumsy folly. That animal selfishness had destroyed the sentiment of the home. It suddenly dawned on Malcolm that Jock had raised a barrier of shame between himself and Gracie, and it maddened him that his personal life should be soiled and confused by the actions of another. He went from the kitchen without saying good night.

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He could not sleep. The night was hot, and the daylight that never dies in the north in June filled the room with a dreary half light. His mind kept revolving the complications of his little circle and the damnable interdependence of human units. Subconsciously, too, he kept awake for a sight of the culprit.

It was after midnight when Jock came home. Malcolm heard from the kitchen the mumble of conversation, occasionally the sharper tone of a voice raised in anger or protest. He wondered how the discussion went. As if talking was of any use now! The thing was done. But human curiosity kept him eager to witness the drama as it passed, and he fidgeted in bed, waiting for Jock to appear.

His brother came to the bedroom at last. Even in the twilight Malcolm could see the scowl on his heavy face. Jock settled himself noisily on his own bed to undress. His boots he threw on the floor with a clatter; his clothes lay where they fell from his hand. From behind the edge of the counterpane Malcolm watched his brother, a giant at bay. Suddenly it came over him that this was just a great innocent, a foolish but amiable being for whom there was no elbow room in conventional society. Poor old Jock!

He opened his eyes again to find that his brother, in a striped nightshirt, was standing by his head at the window. He saw the stupid eyes of Jock turn down to meet his.

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"Hullo, Professor!" said Jock gently.

"Hullo!"

"I suppose they've been telling you?"

"Yes."

"It's a fine old bust-up, isn't it?"

"It is," said Malcolm curtly.

"Nothing to what it'll be like to-morrow." Jock grinned feebly as he moved towards his bed and thumped himself down on it. "Old Duff's coming up to have a jaw with the old man."

He turned his face towards the wall and curled up for slumber.

"If they think they'll get me to marry her, they're bloody well mistaken," said Jock.

Within five minutes he was asleep, leaving Malcolm to bear the burden of worry through the night.

### III

Breakfast next morning was a painful affair. Over the little family hung the black cloud of social disgrace. That they should eat and talk, however spasmodically, as if nothing were amiss, seemed to Malcolm a very painful sort of mockery. If his mother had wept or his father stormed at Jock, it would, he felt, have been more natural and easier to bear. Yet everything was as usual, except for the notable fact that Mr. Tweedie and Jock were not, on this morning of a working day, arrayed

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in working clothes. The visit of Mr. Duff was apparently to be treated with full formality.

It was not until he rose after his last draught of tea from a mighty moustache cup that Mr. Tweedie openly acknowledged the day to be one of significant import.

"When did Mr. Duff say he would be up, Nance?" he asked formally across the breakfast table.

"Eleven." Mrs. Tweedie's tone was crisp, impatient.

"And is he bringing the girl?"

"Tam! Tam!" his wife protested tearfully. She could not any longer sustain the pretence of judicial calm. "Don't say things like that, as if . . . as if it was nothing."

"I was only asking, Nance," said Mr. Tweedie gently.

Malcolm could not bear it. He rose, hesitated just a moment.

"I've got to go down and see Mr. Fraser at the Academy this morning," he said, desperately inventing.

"Wait a minute, Malcolm," he heard his father say, but he pretended not to hear and hurried to the bedroom. There for a time he stood by the window, hesitating. Perhaps he ought to stand by the family in the crisis. But what could he possibly do? On his own behalf he argued irrefutably that there was no help he could give. He wondered if

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he could slip out into the lobby and get his hat without being heard.

He started to hear the door open softly behind him. It was his mother, come to him with a wet, appealing face.

"You'll stay, Malcolm, won't you?" she said. "I wish you'd stay."

It was hard to refuse, but he muttered sullenly, "I can't." She did not move from the door towards him. "What possible good can I do?" he went on grudgingly. "There's no use talking about it."

"Please stay, Malcolm. Please . . ."

She went out and left him alone again with a temper that was rising rapidly against Jock and his stupidities. Now he found that his resolution to remain aloof from the family's troubles was weakening. From that specific worry his mind passed to a pessimistic generalisation, and he wondered bleakly if he and his career must bear for ever with the exasperating intrusions of the extraneous.

Again the door opened behind him, and he turned to see his father there.

"I'll be very much obliged if you'll wait behind this morning, Malcolm," said Mr. Tweedie, gentle and reasonable as ever. "Duff's a nagging sort of fellow. We'll want a cool head among us this morning, I doubt."

It was a pleasant compliment, with its admission of his own accepted maturity, and Malcolm was



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never proof against the appeal of his father's grave decency. He knew the mind of his father in that moment: how it despised the intelligence of Jock, how it feared a scene, how it did not completely trust itself. If Mr. Tweedie approached the conference with something like dramatic relish, his appeal to his son was nevertheless from the bottom of a sadly troubled heart.

"But, father," Malcolm temporised, "what can I possibly do?"

"That we'll see, son," said Mr. Tweedie, "but I'll take it very kindly if you could be there."

"Very well, father," said Malcolm. "I'll wait."

He was overcome immediately by an absurd impulse to run to this grave, lean man and kiss his grey face.

"That's very good of you, Malcolm," said Mr. Tweedie and withdrew. Malcolm turned to the task of bracing himself for what he knew must be a painful and absurd encounter.

Mr. Duff came at eleven prompt, and did not come alone. He was accompanied by a son who, his assistant in a small dairy business near the West Station, was obviously prepared to assist very actively in these domestic negotiations. The Duffs were of a race notorious in the politics of the town. Mr. Duff, senior, was not merely Chairman of the South Ward Committee; he bore a reputation as an inveterate and persistent heckler, in the Radical interest, at the larger political meetings. Young

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Duff ran true to the paternal type. If he favoured a more pronounced Radicalism than his father, if he was even a declared and violent partisan of Labour, he did not disdain to unite with his parent in the destructive criticism of all ideas that did not fit into the narrow and rigid moulds of Duff opinion.

Malcolm saw at a glance, when the party was seated at last in his mother's parlour, how inadequate were the Tweedies to the task of dealing with this formidable couple. Duff senior was a small sinewy man with a cold eye and a ragged moustache that drooped over a merciless mouth. The son took after him: small and spare, with the eyes of a rat and a sweep of lank, black hair across his forehead in the buccaneering fashion set for lesser men by Mr. James Maxton. He looked ready to pounce like a terrior on the weaknesses of the opposition.

Instinctively Mr. Duff took his seat at the head of the table, his back to the fireplace. It had been in Mr. Tweedie's mind that they would talk informally, but Mr. Duff, taking command of the situation, created in a moment the atmosphere of those Committee Meetings in which the cold rectitude of the narrower sort of Scot delights. At once his son took the next best place opposite his father, leaving Mr. Tweedie to sidle into a chair between them. Jock, like a prisoner at the bar, sat with his sullen face to the light and looked

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lonely against the mahogany mass of a Victorian sideboard. It was left to Malcolm to slip unostentatiously into a seat beside and slightly behind his father.

The proceedings (for it had come to that) opened with a speech by Mr. Duff. He pointed out that they were gathered together to discuss a matter of some importance. It was, perhaps, too late in the day to indulge in recriminations; what was done couldn't be undone; but he made bold to claim the right of indignation on behalf of his family.

"We've been shamed," cried Mr. Duff. "That girl of mine was a steady-goin' girl till this fellow came along." He jerked his head at Jock. "And mark my words, Mr. Tweedie, he or you's got to pay, and pay handsomely, for the mischief he has done."

"Hear, hear!" said young Duff truculently.

"What's reasonable, Mr. Duff . . ." poor Mr. Tweedie began.

"Just a minute, sir," the chairman brushed the interruption aside. "Ye'll allow me to say my say, if you please."

"As you will, Mr. Duff."

The little man went on with his oration. Sick at heart, Malcolm ceased to listen. The whole business was to him unutterably farcical and humiliating. It was borne in upon him that the

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concern of Mr. Duff was more for his own injured vanity than for the honour of a girl who was to go through with the agonies of childbirth. The significance of Annie Duff and her baby dwindled to nothing while her absurd father held the field. She was even less than the truculent brother who had come ostensibly to plead for her. Malcolm wondered what Annie Duff thought about it all. She, after all, was the principal in the drama. But her grievance had been stolen for their own spectacular ends by her champions. The Duffs ignored Annie, ignored Jock and rasped their personal grievance at poor Mr. Tweedie, who was ready to concede them their case from the first. But they had to enjoy the delights of opposition.

"Anything that's right, Mr. Duff . . ." Mr. Tweedie would interject feebly between the freshets of Duff oratory.

"And what d'ye call right?" young Duff would retort fiercely.

They gave Mr. Tweedie no chance to explain. They roared him down. Aloof from these truculences, an unwilling spectator of his father's humiliation, Malcolm reached a point when he could bear it no longer. The tension in his jangled nerves gave him a desperate courage. Into a pause he thrust a quick, impatient sentence.

"I suppose they'll get married, and that'll be the end of it," he said.

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The interruption dumbfounded the Duffs. They exchanged horrified glances. That their eloquence should be checked was infuriating. Coming from the audience, as it were, the suggestion was to them an intolerable affront. They turned from Mr. Tweedie to Malcolm.

"That's what you think, is it?" they bellowed at him.

"You would think so, too, if you had any sense," cried Malcolm, near to choking with emotion.

The Duffs paused. That they should be challenged so bluntly was momentarily too much for them. Mr. Tweedie's quiet voice broke in, deprecating.

"Malcolm, Malcolm!" he cautioned his impetuous son.

"Well, we can't sit here gassing all day," said Malcolm sullenly.

He waited for the storm to break. Very much to his surprise, and to the outraged amazement of the Duffs, it was the dull, stifled voice of Jock that filled the pause.

"If you think I'm going to marry her, you can think again," he said.

"Jock, Jock!" thundered Mr. Tweedie.

"You can think what you like, but I'm not," blurted Jock. "If she says it was me, she's a liar. I wasn't the only one."

At once young Duff was on his feet. He leaned

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across the table and thrust his snarling face into that of Jock's.

"Ye're a liar! Ye're a bloody liar! Ye ought to get yer ugly neck twisted."

Jock rose to the challenge. The boor vanished, and the fighter appeared. He rose, his hands pulling back the lapels of his jacket.

"Would you like to have a try at it?" he asked eagerly.

Young Duff sat down again.

"We'll see about that," he said.

"Any time you like," retorted Jock hopefully.

And with that the fire seemed to go out of the Duffs. The son sat silent, scowling at the green tablecloth. The father reverted eagerly to the approved rules of committee procedure.

"There you are, then, Mr. Tweedie," he said. "This lad of yours has made a very serious allegation against my girl. We'll see what the lawyers have to say about that. He'll have to marry her, or I'm very much mistaken."

"I'll see to that," said Mr. Tweedie grimly. He was glad to have brought the Duffs at last to his own point of view. They had had their hour of truculence. Mr. Tweedie repeated, "I'll see to that."

But Malcolm noticed with concern that Jock preserved a significant silence on the subject until and after the Duffs had gone with their grievance.

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### IV

The storm raised by the Duffs was followed by a calm that brought to young Malcolm a feeling of uneasiness. If Jock was to be married at once, as his father insisted, then it followed that some sort of preparation must be made. A married couple, reasoned Malcolm, must have a house, yet no step was taken in that direction. Then it occurred to him—and the idea pained him somehow—that Jock and Annie Duff, married as a concession to expedient, were to continue to live apart. A dismal prospect, meaning that two young people must go through the slow years with leaden chains about their necks. It was no solution, and Malcolm's vicarious anxiety was such that he hungered for this muddy problem to be solved once and for all.

The tension in the domestic atmosphere was intolerable. Malcolm saw the marks of heart-break on the face of his mother, of worry on that of his patient father. Jock came and went as usual, but he was sullen. There should have been speech to break the spell and clear the air, but for a fortnight not a word was said on the matter. Nor did the Duffs return to claim damages for family honour outraged.

On Malcolm's work the effect of this uneasiness was disastrous. He could not, for apprehension of an explosion to come, lose himself in his books.



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His days were restless and empty and unsatisfying. And then, his gravest personal worry, the visit to Argyllshire drew near. Gracie had fixed the date by letter. But how could he depart with an easy mind while calamity was hanging over the family? He certainly could not bear to think of losing the chance of happiness with Gracie. Yet the crisis might come on the eve of his departure.

By now his mother knew of the plan.

"That'll be a nice holiday, Malcolm," she had said. "But——"

He knew the meaning of that "but"; that she looked to him to stand by the family, and that she thought it selfish of him to think of pleasure in the hour of her own agony. Then he knew that he could not leave her should the trouble come. But was it coming at all? And if so, when?

In his desperation, within a week of the due date of his departure, he spoke to Jock, almost begging for the resolution of his difficulties. Jock laughed darkly.

"You take my tip, Professor," he said, "and go for your holiday. There's going to be no flakin' marriage."

"But——"

"But no, I'm telling you. It's a plant of these dirty Duffs." Jock took to grumbling again. "Annie's been a bit too free with herself. You ask anybody. There's been dozens. . . . You ask

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anybody. They're bloomin' well not going to land it on me."

Jock threw himself into bed and drew the blankets to his chin.

"You go on your holiday, Professor," he resumed easily, "and chance it."

It was all very well, but Malcolm preferred an assurance from a more reliable source. And he could not get it; he could not speak on such a subject to either of his parents.

The week passed, and Friday came. On Saturday morning at nine o'clock Malcolm was to catch the West Highland steamer at King's Pier. In the evening he packed, almost with gladness. He felt the exhilaration of a race against time. It might be done; he might get clear before the blow fell. With Gracie he would be so happy, and he would forget. He tried to believe that he might even forget the sad look that was on his mother's face when she had come upon him at his packing.

"So you're going, Malcolm," she had said.

He went to bed early, but he could not sleep. Too many conflicting worries haunted his mind. In any event, he could never sleep until Jock had thrown his heavy body onto the bed next his. And Jock was late that night.

The loud bell of the West Parish Kirk banged the twelve strokes of midnight through the northern twilight. One stroke, two strokes, three strokes, one stroke, and again one stroke—the quarter

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signals that followed fell bleakly on his ear. And still Jock did not come. It was near two when Malcolm's heart jumped to his throat at the soft opening of his bedroom door. His heart thudding, he raised himself to see through the gloom the figure of his mother in a white nightdress. Her whisper sounded ghostly.

"Is Jock not in?" she asked.

"No, mother," he answered.

Like a ghost she disappeared. The door of the kitchen clicked behind her. His eyes hot and heavy, Malcolm laid his head on the pillow once more. The dawn came.

He counted the quarters till nearly five. Then he was cheered a little by a stir of movement from the kitchen. His father, a gaunt figure in a long pink nightshirt, came into his room. The old man's face was haggard and pitiable.

"It's a bad business, this, Malcolm," he said drearily. "It's near five, and he's not back. Your mother's in a terrible state."

"I wonder where he is," Malcolm speculated vaguely.

"Dear knows," said Mr. Tweedie. "I wish you'd come in and speak to your poor mother."

Wrapped in a dressing gown, her face stained with weeping, her hair draggled and her eyes wild, she sat rocking herself on a chair. At the sight of Malcolm she cried aloud.

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"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she moaned. "What's become of my boy? What's become of my boy?"

Malcolm knew what haunted her—a picture of Jock, white and dead in the Town's Dam. He reacted quickly against the extravagance of the vision. Her intemperance of emotion angered him.

"Nonsense, mother!" he spoke crossly. "Jock's run away, that's all."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" she cried. "He's gone! He's gone!"

"I believe you're right, Malcolm," the grave voice of Mr. Tweedie broke in.

"I know I am. Mother, it's all right. Please. . . . He's run away, that's all." In his desperation he lied wildly. "Mother, he told me. He's run away, that's all, really."

"He told you, Malcolm?" Mr. Tweedie's cry of relief was eager.

"Practically. We can do nothing just now. I'll find out in the morning. I'll go and get dressed now."

He hurried from the kitchen and the lamentations of his mother. He knew that his father must stay with her, while he went out on the hopeless task of looking for Jock. He realised then that Gracie would wait for him on the pier at Tarbert in vain. He found himself weeping while he dressed, whimpering like a peevish child.

There was no breakfast for him that morning.

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Mrs. Tweedie was beyond such worldly considerations, and it was with difficulty that she was persuaded to drink a cup of tea which Malcolm brewed over a smoky fire of his own laying. All sense of time and order had departed from the household with Jock. It had just gone eight when Malcolm found himself out in the early sunshine in Mountjoy Street, facing on an empty stomach and with a head that throbbed after a sleepless night the ludicrously difficult task of tracking his errant brother.

It did not occur to him to go to the police. He did not believe for a moment that the morbid forebodings of his mother had any justification. It was not in Jock to make a melodramatic gesture; the disappearance was nothing but a piece of thoughtless stupidity on the part of one who had tired of the inconveniences of industry and scandal. So like Jock, to take such a blundering, unnecessary step! It was the act of an innocent rather than that of a criminal. It was certainly not a job for the police; and Malcolm had the instinct of his class for respectability at all costs. His sensible plan was to seek out the friend of Jock's bosom, Alec Macfarlane, who worked for Blair the builder in Quarry Road.

The builder's yard was empty when he reached it, and the young woman, who with her desk and stool and a gas stove filled the box of an office, was hardly helpful.

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"Alec Macfarlane," she repeated slowly, scratching her head with the end of a pen, "I'm sure I don't know."

"But he works for you," said Malcolm.

"That's right," she agreed dully. "He works for us, right enough. But I'm not right sure where he is the day. We've that many jobs on. He might be in the Port. Or down at the new shelter in the Battery. Or mebbe he's away with the squad to the West Harbour. I'm not extra sure."

"Couldn't you find out?"

The young woman thought she might. She slid heavily from her stool and cried across the dusty lumber of the yard: "Peter! Peter!" The bent figure of an old man in powdered clothes appeared from behind a stack of planks.

"Peter!" shrilled the young woman. "D'ye ken what job Alec Macfarlane's on the day?"

"The Port," grunted the old man and disappeared again.

"He's in the Port," said the girl, turning brightly to Malcolm. "Ye'll find them at a new cottage up the Clune Brae."

It takes three-quarters of an hour in a tramcar from the Square to the Port, and the Clune Brae is a steep and wearisome hill. When Malcolm reached the cottage of his search, it was only to find that Alec Macfarlane had returned to the yard. For nearly an hour he hung about the road, looking down from the heights on the smoke of

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the Port and the mud flats beyond the ship channel of the River. Again he asked information of a mason, who scratched his head and gave it as his deliberate view that Alec might not return to the job that day, which was, after all, a short day. The mason was prepared to enlarge on the peculiar qualities of half days, but Malcolm thanked him briefly and hastened downhill towards the town.

His search for Alec Macfarlane lasted over noon and through the luncheon hour. Returning to the yard, he was sent by the young woman in the office to the West Harbour, to find there that Jock's friend had gone down with a message to the Battery. And at the Battery they were not sure whether he had returned to the yard or not. . . . Alec was whistling over his Saturday afternoon shave in his mother's kitchen when Malcolm ran him to earth at last.

He listened with his mouth open to the story of Jock's disappearance.

"Gees O!" he exclaimed at last, then laughed loudly at this latest exploit of his friend. "He's a great lad, Jock, right enough!"

It took some time to convince him that the matter was serious. But he did not know where Jock had gone. Like Jock, he was a slow thinker and could not offer any helpful suggestions.

"No," he ruminated dully. "I couldna' say. He's a queer lad, Jock, right enough. Ye never



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know what he'd do. No, I couldna' right say, Malcolm."

Then a ray of intelligence suddenly lighted up his face.

"I'll tell you what, though. I suppose you know about that offer he got from the Springburn Swifts?"

"No!" cried Malcolm, seeing a light.

"Oh, he got it right enough. A regular wage and a soft job in a pub. Gees, they've been after him for weeks."

Delight in the idiosyncrasies of his friend overcame Alec Macfarlane again. He slapped his leg.

"I'll bet you what you like," he guffawed, "that the old beggar's been and took it!"

Malcolm hurried home. This clue would surely set his mother's mind at ease. The search for Jock could be resumed confidently after a week-end of rest and thought. Malcolm began to think of his own affairs, of the long and elaborate letter of explanation he would write to Gracie. It might even be possible that he would be able to travel on the Tuesday.

His father was waiting for him in the lobby. Mr. Tweedie's face was haggard, and his eyes telegraphed an anxious question. Malcolm rapidly explained the outcome of his search. The old man sighed relief.

"Thank God it may be no worse!" he breathed. "It's been a terrible day, Malcolm. Your mother

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. . . she's that put about, poor soul. If we could only be sure, though. I wonder, Malcolm, if ye'd think of going right on to Glasgow?"

"Now?"

"It's your mother, Malcolm. She's that put about. There'll be no peace in the house till she's sure. She's gotten some wild, wild notions into her head."

The appeal was irresistible, though it reminded him again of the irritating unreasonableness of women. Malcolm glanced at his watch.

"Heavens, I've only ten minutes to catch the four-five at King's Pier! All right, father. . . . I won't be late."

He had to run nearly a mile downhill for the train, and he caught it on the stroke of the bell.

It was the only swift passage of all that dreary day. Arrived in Glasgow, he passed an hour in a wearisome search for the ground of the Springburn Swifts among the red sandstone tenements and brick factories in that wilderness on the northern border of the city. When he found it at length, the gates were locked, and he had to loiter aimlessly until a policeman informed him that the manager of the Swifts managed also a public house in the Springburn Road. Fortunately, it was Saturday night. The manager would be there, coping with the vast week-end thirst of Springburn. But it took Malcolm twenty minutes to find the shop:

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The manager was a burly man. As befitted his two appointments, he had a roughly jovial manner.

"I signed your brother on this morning, son, signed him on 'his morning,'" he announced with satisfaction. "And a very nice wee bit o' business for both parties. He's away out the now, looking for lodgings."

He could not say when Jock might return. There was no obligation on Jock to return that night at all. But Malcolm was very hospitably provided with bread and cheese, a bottle of ginger beer, and the evening paper.

"You stay's long's ye like, son," said the manager, "but I'll have to leave you, for we're busy in the shop."

And Malcolm stayed, waiting patiently, till he had little more than an hour in which to catch the last train for home. The public house closed at nine—such is liberty in industrial Scotland—with loud cries of "Time, gen'lemen! Time, please!" from the manager. But he assured Malcolm that he need not hurry since the cash had still to be counted. Malcolm assisted him with the coppers. There came a moment, however, when it became plain that the manager was impatient to get home. Malcolm dared not challenge the clock any longer.

"Are ye very keen to see this brother of yours the night?" asked the manager; and when Malcolm, nearly desperate, told him the story: "Dear me, son, I didna' know it was as bad as that. It's a

## YOUNG MALCOLM

pity on the old lady, right enough. I tell ye what, son—I'll slip ye a wee letter with his address, and ye can come up and nab him on the quiet. Eh?"

So it was arranged, and Malcolm caught his train. The carriage was full of drunken men, and he had to stand for more than an hour, his head aching and his knees like water with the fatigue of the day. And it came over him as a sudden shock that he ought to have telegraphed to Gracie. There would be a reproachful, it might be an angry, letter from her on Monday. Or no letter at all—just the unbearable silence of her indignation.

A terrible day. But at least he could assure his mother that Jock was still in life.

### v

It was Wednesday of the following week before the Tweedies saw Jock in the flesh again. The manager kept his word. By a morning train, Mr. and Mrs. Tweedie went off together to reason with their prodigal. Malcolm nearly wept to see them go. And his mother was weeping when they returned in the evening. Mr. Tweedie shook his head.

"He'll no' come back, Malcolm," he said sadly. "His mind's made up. He's put his name to the paper. After all," added Mr. Tweedie philosophically, "a contrack's a contrack."

## *YOUNG MALCOLM*

So Jock was gone for good. Malcolm could not feel sorry. Jock had spoiled a summer for him.

Gracie's letter of reproach had come on the Monday—not so reproachful, however, as Malcolm had feared. Gracie's concern was that he had fallen ill. What was wrong? He must write at once. And why had he not sent a telegram? Surely that was due to her. . . . But Malcolm had already written at length on the Sunday, and her second letter came on Tuesday. She forgave him, bless her! She understood perfectly. He was not to worry. It was a pity, but he was not to worry. And he would see her within a fortnight.

But he had, after all, missed the glory of that holiday with Gracie. He, who must work, work, work, had had his sacred programme shattered by an affair that was no concern of his. Because his fool of a brother chose to break loose, he must suffer. Malcolm wondered ruefully if life was always like that; if uncontrollable circumstances must keep breaking in disastrously on a man's peace of mind.

## CHAPTER VI

### I

HE IS a brave man who, after weary days in the examination halls and hours of agony before the oral examiners, haunts the cloisters until the Final results are posted at the Lodge late on the evening of a fatal day. It was certainly not in young Malcolm Tweedie to endure that torment of waiting. From his last viva voce he fled to the train for home. He was to get a telegram from a friend. Waiting at home for that telegram was bad enough. His sense told him that he had satisfied the examiners, but his lamentable instinct of inferiority allowed the feverish forebodings of failure to plague his mind.

To answer the knock of the boy in uniform was a blessed relief from days of strain. It was all right.

"Congrats," said the telegram facetiously. "Passed like winking and distinctions galore."

The effect of the message was to bring calm to Malcolm. He smiled tolerantly when his mother wept for joy and pride and, perhaps, premonitory fear. He did not carry it off at all well when his

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father, returning late from a lecture in the Temperance Institute, shook him solemnly by the hand, man to man. This seemed to Malcolm just a little bit spectacular. As a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery—M.B., Ch.B., as he might now sign himself—he could afford to take his own distinction lightly.

Yet it was very pleasant to have done it. The prideful joy of sending a telegram to Gracie! To meet Mr. Ainslie in the street and talk to him as one graduate to another! And to dream greatly of the fair, broad land of learning that now lay before him! Malcolm had a week of high happiness.

Then he had to face the business of Capping. His vanity liked the idea, but his nerves revolted. It was not merely the ordeal of marching before the Principal; the social obligations were much more formidable. Malcolm saw with some alarm that at this Graduation Ceremony he was destined to be the central figure in a domestic tableau. It was but natural that his father and mother should be there to see him capped. And he wanted Gracie to behold him in open receipt of the laurel. But it appeared that Miss Mackenzie demanded a place in the group, and that Miss Mackenzie wished Mrs. Dinwiddie to see, if not to hear, the proceedings in the Bute Hall. What privately agonised Malcolm was the fact that his parents and the Arlington Street group joined forces to make of it a large, sentimental occasion. Some-



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how he disliked being petted and admired in this highly organised fashion. He resented having to cut a public caper. But he was powerless against the forces of sentiment. He found himself claiming four tickets for the public gallery. By a merciful dispensation it was decided that Mrs. Dinwiddie should wait behind and see to the dinner.

Three women, near to hysteria with anxiety and pride, and one grave man watched that ceremony in the Bute Hall with eyes bent exclusively on one slight figure. Miss Mackenzie was the least excited, for her pride was vicarious. She beamed incessantly and impartially applauded every graduate. Mr. Tweedie was silent and grave, but a close observer might have noticed that he ran his tongue along his lips from time to time, and that the muscles of his lower jaw flexed and knotted continuously. For Gracie, the ceremony was one long strain. She was keyed up so taut that she must remain silent, lest a shriek escape her. Of the three women Mrs. Tweedie most openly abandoned herself to emotion. She wept while a procession of young men passed before the Principal. Mothers' sons, every one of them. . . . Mrs. Tweedie wept. Then it became necessary for her to grip the small, soft hand of Gracie—Gracie who was part of young Malcolm. She did not hear her husband's respectable voice in her ear.

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"Wheesht, Nance! Wheesht, lass! Ye're making a terrible noise."

It was to her just a blur. Across the platform, in the distance, graduates passed before the rostrum, knelt and disappeared. Men students in the galleries made loud noises and drowned the Principal's words. A group of women students, wearing their gowns, made a bold splash of scarlet under the platform. Mrs. Tweedie wept.

At last the voice of the Bedellus sang out two awful words:

"Malcolm Tweedie."

Through a haze she saw her boy rise from the benches beside the platform, his gown with its brilliant hood over his arm. She heard a voice sonorously declaim, "With distinction in . . ." A roar from the students drowned the recital. It was her boy who advanced nervously and knelt before the black and gold figure of the Principal; it was her boy's head that was touched by the black velvet cap. A scroll passed. Over Malcolm's shoulders the Bedellus draped the gown with its bachelor's hood.

Mrs. Tweedie saw no more. She had seen too much. She sobbed loudly. "Let me out! Let me out!"

Gracie pressed her hand, and Mr. Tweedie cautioned her impatiently. "Wheesht, woman! Hold your tongue!"

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And an undergraduate behind offered irreverent assistance. "Lean on me, mother, lean on me!"

It was just a shy, nervous boy, a little paler than usual, they met under the tower half an hour later. He took their congratulations with an uneasy affectation of the casual. As they walked down the drive towards the Lodge, Miss Mackenzie made appropriate remarks.

"A very nice little ceremony, Malcolm," she said, embracing the University in her approval. "Everything went off very well, I thought."

"Very impressive. Very impressive indeed," said Mr. Tweedie.

All that Gracie could do was to hold tight to Malcolm's hand, and as for Mrs. Tweedie, she dabbed her eyes.

## II

Malcolm discovered as the day wore on that he, the sole root and cause of these domestic celebrations, was yet destined by the common and tacit agreement of the others to play a silent and inconspicuous part in the proceedings.

His own desire was to be alone with Gracie. There were so many things to be discussed with Gracie, things that could be discussed with her alone. He had qualified, the gates were open, and the world was spread out fairly before him. Was it not fitting, indeed imperative, that he should

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in his moment of achievement talk of the future with her who was, sooner or later, to share it? But Miss Mackenzie had not appreciated these romantic subtleties. Miss Mackenzie had seized the occasion, so delightful to her generous heart, to make of the day a family festival. They were bound from the University gates to a luncheon party in Arlington Street. As the white tram hurled them down Woodlands Road, Malcolm, stifled by the apprehension of speeches and discussions as to his future, reflected how absurd and unmanageable were parties of the kind.

They filled the sitting room, already much reduced in capacity by the shining table Mrs. Dinwiddie had prepared. Even Miss Mackenzie's aplomb was affected by the difficulty of distributing them over the available easy-chairs. Then the introduction of Mrs. Dinwiddie to Mr. and Mrs. Tweedie was an affair of some difficulty, especially since Mr. Tweedie, desperately anxious to show his pleasure in the meeting, insisted on having from that poor deaf lady an account of her health. The entry of a fox-terrier puppy, a recent gift from Matthew to his aunt, complicated the situation. Miss Mackenzie's voice was heard above the din.

"Don't heed her, Mr. Tweedie. She's as deaf as a post."

"What's that, ma'am?" asked Mr. Tweedie, turning from his companion and cupping a hand round his own bad ear. In the act he put a solid foot

on the puppy's tail, and the puppy complained according to his lights.

"Dear me! Dear me!" wailed Mr. Tweedie, remorseful.

"You and your big feet, Tam!" Mrs. Tweedie chided him.

It was some time before the crisis passed. When she spoke again, Miss Mackenzie's voice had in it a note of impatience.

"Now, everybody!" she called them to attention. "Before we sit down, I think we'll drink a wee toast to Malcolm."

Miss Mackenzie turned to the sideboard and to a dark bottle labelled "Tawny Invalid Port." On the others fell the uncomfortable silence of polite anticipation.

"A glass of port wine, Mrs. Tweedie?"

"Aw, I don't think so."

"Tits, woman!" Mr. Tweedie reproved her social inadequacy.

Soon everyone had a glass of the thick, dark stuff in hand. There was another pause. Mrs. Dinwiddie, in a world of her own, took a premature sip. She was nudged by Miss Mackenzie, and the wine lipped over the edge of the glass on to her fingers. These she licked. From that embarrassment all eyes turned hopefully to Mr. Tweedie.

He was standing now, his gawky figure against the fireplace. Slowly he lifted his glass and looked at his son.

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"Well, Malcolm . . ."

Then he lowered his glass and cleared his throat. It was patent that Mr. Tweedie had jumped, with a grave sense of the proprieties, to the opportunity of making a speech, and Malcolm groaned inwardly.

"Well, ladies. . . ." Mr. Tweedie began again and again hesitated.

"Hurry up, Tam," said Mrs. Tweedie impatiently.

But Mr. Tweedie was not to be hurried. His mind worked slowly, and the antique phrases, that he had heard thousands of times in lecture halls, got their full value on his lips. As he gathered confidence, his sentiment grew on him. He recalled Malcolm as a baby; he touched movingly on the prenatal hopes of Malcolm's mother . . . "my good lady here." Miss Mackenzie nodded approval of the points, and her eyes shone kindly. Gracie's face was grave, her eyes steady on the empty fireplace. Mrs. Tweedie wept again.

At last the orator meandered back to the point. Now he raised his glass unhesitatingly.

"Malcolm!"

"Malcolm!"

The boy was strangely moved by that small chorus of women's voices. The kindness of women was to him always a lovely and moving thing. He felt the warmth of tears at his eyes, and he could hardly speak.

"Thank you very much—everybody," he man-

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aged to say, and the puppy returned, his injuries forgotten, to create a welcome diversion.

In due course they sat down to a solid and pleasant meal, and conversation lost for a time the solemn quality Mr. Tweedie was apt to give it. He left the field to the ladies and devoted himself gravely to the viands. Once or twice in the course of the meal, however, he paused in his chewing to observe solemnly of the Graduation Ceremony, "Well, Miss Mackenzie, I must say it passed off very well."

Mrs. Tweedie did not fail to point out to him that it is bad manners to speak with one's mouth full. She cried a horrified "Tam!" at him when he eructated softly over the marmalade pudding. Malcolm wished that his mother wouldn't, and Miss Mackenzie, always the perfect hostess, murmured, "Don't mention it."

"He's a terrible man at the table," sighed Mrs. Tweedie as of an absent friend.

Tea was served within half an hour of the meal, and if the women would have gossiped over that rite, Mr. Tweedie was not to be diverted from the engaging significance of the day.

"Well," he began, slowly masticating bread and butter, "the next question is, what is Malcolm going to do with himself now that he's a proper doctor?"

With that, a formal discussion between Mr. Tweedie and Miss Mackenzie was instituted the



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others holding aloof. It transpired that Miss Mackenzie had been thinking over this question. She was all for the establishment of Malcolm in a nice little practice in a nice suburb—Kelvinside or Newlands. Or one of those nice new places like Whitecraigs or Burnside.

"There's nothing like a brass plate," said Miss Mackenzie, symbolising her vicarious ideal.

Mr. Tweedie was not so sure. He sucked at his tea and shook a thoughtful head.

"Surgery," said Mr. Tweedie at large. "Operations. . . . There's a fine line of business in surgery."

"And wait for years till your chance comes!" retorted Miss Mackenzie. "No, no. A brass plate."

"I'm not so sure." Mr. Tweedie passed his cup to be replenished. "It's steady, mind ye. I'll give ye that. But there's bigger things. Harley Street . . . Ye'll have heard of Harley Street, Miss Mackenzie? As much as a hundred pound for a morning's work. Big things there."

He paused to ruminate over these vast possibilities, and Miss Mackenzie turned archly to Malcolm.

"Don't you heed him, Malcolm," she said. "You take my advice. A nice wee brass plate in a nice district."

Malcolm smiled. He did not take any part in the debate. These excellent people who were gravely shaping his life knew so little of the relevant facts.

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He did not wish, in any event, to let the note of seriousness break in on the pleasant domesticities of the afternoon. Perhaps he did not wish to admit to himself, in that lazy moment of reaction, that his secret dream might take him far beyond the easy and prosperous paths marked for him by those who loved him.

Only one word of the debate did he lay to heart. It came from his mother who, when the discussion flagged, wound it up with one pregnant sentence.

"Wherever he goes," she said, "I hope he'll have the sense to stay near home."

Their glances clashed, and Malcolm understood. It was an ultimatum. He knew then that another fight for the freedom of his soul and his intelligence was before him.

### III

But his most immediate need was to have it out with Gracie. Possessed by that need, he did not fully realise its significance: that he had transferred from his mother to a girl his own sense of responsibility. He just had to speak to Gracie, and while the party in Arlington Street was breaking up, there grew on him a passionate desire to be alone with her.

The chance came to him easily enough. His mother and father, making a day of it, were going

## *YOUNG MALCOLM*

on to visit old friends in Govan, and they did not suggest that Malcolm should go with them. He was left to see Gracie home and so to amuse himself until the family would reunite in the Central Station. The young people walked straight down Sauchiehall Street and out of the sunshine of the summer afternoon into the cool, lighted lounge of the Picture House.

Those pleasant marble halls were deserted. Canaries in bright cages beneath the balconies competed brightly and, for once in a while successfully with the cool music of the fountain. Basket chairs in a corner cunningly lighted by invisible arcs, basket chairs that were deep and richly cushioned, invited their confidence. A pretty girl in starched cap and print wrapper glided out to take their orders, served the coffee and the ice, and disappeared. They were left to whisper to their hearts' content.

Malcolm's instinct at first was not, by any means, to whisper. An indignation had grown upon him, and now, in the company of Gracie, who would listen meekly to all he had to say, he could afford to expand with the brutal impatience of youth on those relations of his and hers who dared in their ignorance to lay down the law about his future. True to masculine type, he inclined to make the girl the butt of his large contempt for the ignorant and officious.

The point was this—as he laid down the law to

Gracie—that he did not by a long chalk propose to bury himself in any fusty practice. That, he observed coarsely, was a midwife's job for the ordinary graduate. Malcolm reminded her, and himself, that his degree had been granted "With high commendation." And Laidlaw, the physiology man, had lain in wait for him after the Final and urged him towards research, to go to Hill at University College and see what they were doing in the physics of physiology, to go abroad—to Leyden, for instance. Einstein was at Leyden.

As he spoke eagerly, Malcolm recaptured from the welter of sentiment the jewel of his dream. The high, fine purpose of the clever youth flamed again before his eyes. There were such splendid things to be done!

"You see?" he would invite her sympathetic enthusiasm, and the vigorous nod of her bright head would reassure him.

"Yes, Malcolm. That would be splendid."

He softened as the loveliness of his ambitions dawned on him, and he passed from abuse of the philistine to expand with the charming, ego-centric rapture of his kind on the things he would do. Look what other men had done, men whose names were writ on brass—Harvey, Lister, Pasteur, Wassermann, Banting, and the others of a noble line! To do something. By working, working, working, endlessly patient, sustained only by the immaculate joy of learning, of making clear.

## YOUNG MALCOLM

So he talked. If he was ludicrous, it was to Gracie, and to Gracie alone, that he could tell his dreams thus. She listened, her eyes shining with pride and enthusiasm. She had to listen for a long time before the flood of his eagerness slackened. Then she spoke diffidently:

"Malcolm."

"Yes, Gracie?"

"How long—how long do you think it will take you, all this?"

"Oh!" he laughed expansively. "How could you possibly tell! Years!"

He turned to laugh at her and checked himself before the look on her face. It was sad and forlorn, the face of a patient and lovely one whose privy dreams have been dashed, the face of one who is left behind and dares not, for modesty, cry out to be remembered. But what she, unselfish always, could not say, her misty eyes said for her. He snatched her hand and crushed his lips against its soft skin.

"Gracie dear! It's all right for you and me. Really, Gracie! Nothing can stop things for us—nothing, Gracie. O little sweetheart!"

And he went on kissing her hand till she pulled it from him.

"But, Malcolm," she protested quietly, "you've just said . . . Oh, I can't tell you!" And a tear came out on her cheek.

He could not see his own inconsistency. He could

## YOUNG MALCOLM

in that uplifted moment cherish two passions that might, to a cooler mind, have seemed to conflict. At the moment he was possessed entirely by his love for Gracie.

"Please don't, Gracie. It's all right, really. I love you. . . ."

She said nothing, and though he reached for her hand, again she would not surrender it. A note of intense earnestness came into his voice as he whispered to her averted ear.

"I love you, Gracie. And you love me. Don't you, Gracie? Gracie, don't you love me? You know you do. Say it, Gracie. Say you love me."

She did not say it, but he begged and begged of her till he saw a deeper blush come over her cheeks and saw her nod ever so slightly, ever so shyly.

He became then terribly conscious of the lounge of the picture house, of the canaries and the fountain and the orchestra upstairs and the waitresses in the background and the few couples that had come to people the place. But he did, awkwardly and tenderly, put out his fingers to touch her neck, exquisitely warm and soft. He laughed lightly.

"I suppose we're engaged now, Gracie," he said.

"I suppose we are, Malcolm," she laughed in return.

He was smitten at once by a thought of extreme gravity.

"We must buy a ring," he said.

"We'll do nothing of the sort. Wasting money!"

## YOUNG MALCOLM

That was so. It was humiliating to reflect that he would have to ask it from his father; and it would be embarrassingly difficult to justify the demand. He dismissed the sordid reflection. They were engaged, and the secrecy of their troth was sweet.

"Dear Gracie!" he whispered, and she put out her hand to touch his.

Malcolm went home in high fettle. His doubts had been removed. Gracie was wonderfully his, and Gracie saw that he must go on as a student. With her belief behind him, he would be strong. Nevertheless, he found it difficult to dismiss altogether the memory of that look on his mother's face.

### IV

There may be strong men in this world who shape their ends without the aid of a divinity, but young Malcolm Tweedie was not one of them. His secret purpose was to pursue the study of medicine as a research worker and to refuse the security that might be had behind a brass plate. That purpose, to be sure, governed the general direction of his path through life; but his feet were not set upon the road by a voluntary act of courageous decision. His sensitiveness stood between him and a display of strength before his sensitive mother. He hesitated and allowed his fate to come upon him.



## YOUNG MALCOLM

For a month after his graduation young Malcolm stayed at home and did nothing, just because what he wanted to do was, for him in the presence of his mother, so difficult to do. He did nothing but wait for the coming of circumstances that would force a decision one way or another. It was fatally easy to excuse himself to himself. A man needed a rest after five years of hard work, he argued speciously.

That was also Mrs. Tweedie's excuse for delaying the crisis which, after the affair of Jock, she feared so much. She could not bear to think of old age, which comes like a frost on a household when the young people go their ways. She saw with prophetic vision the loneliness of two old people by the fireside on winter evenings. She knew that she would listen for the sound of young footsteps on the stairs, for the rough heartiness of young voices, and listen in vain. It was in the maternal nature to keep the spectre at arm's length, by deceiving herself if necessary.

Of the household it was only Mr. Tweedie who harped on the subject. He had no feeling for the more elusive impulses of emotion, and the establishment of his son in the serious business of earning a living was to him a matter of lively interest. He returned to the subject again and again.

"Well," he would say over the breakfast table, "I suppose we'll have to be settlin' this bit business of yours, Malcolm."

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"I suppose so," Malcolm would reply without enthusiasm.

"Och, there's plenty of time!" was Mrs. Tweedie's invariable remark. "The laddie needs a rest."

"A rest! That's right enough, but" — Mr. Tweedie shook his head — "but we might as well be doing a bit spade work, like."

"Time enough."

Mr. Tweedie would then look at his wife gravely. His mild, slow mind never fully appreciated the point she sought to make.

"That's right enough, but . . ."

They saw that Mr. Tweedie did not cease to think of the matter, but they knew that he was incapable of quick, decisive action. His wife went on in the blind hope of her kind; his son walked in the country, wrote to Gracie, and waited for something to turn up that would resolve his perplexities.

Something had to turn up, and it did. There came by the midday post one day, addressed to Malcolm in writing he did not recognise, a letter from London. As he read it, standing by the window of his mother's kitchen, he wished that the house were empty. The letter excited him. But his mother was there, bent over pots on the fire.

"Is it from Gracie?" she asked casually.

"No, from a man I knew at college."

A lump was in his throat. It was from Laidlaw, demonstrator in physiology. Laidlaw had been

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combining work and pleasure in London—"having a squint at Hill's labs. in University College," he phrased it. It had occurred to him to put in a word for Malcolm, but there were no vacancies in the meantime. However—and here the heart of Malcolm seemed to rise and choke him—Gandy at St. Olave's was looking for a keen man to help him with a big series of experiments he hoped to start in the autumn. "Of course, you know Gandy's work on muscle—one of the real big men. He's working up to something pretty big, I fancy, and you'll be in at the death. It's a chance. Please God you are not doing House in some rotten Cottage Hospital." Malcolm was to write at once, whereupon everything would be fixed up for September.

His fingers trembled as he trust the note back into the envelope. He felt that the kitchen, his mother, and the familiar furnishings were of a world unreal. He was silent over the meal; more than once he found himself staring at the butter. He did not taste the food, and he ate it so quickly that a lump of indigestion remained with him for the rest of the day. It had just gone two when he went from the house under the pretext of taking that afternoon a particularly ambitious walk.

Laidlaw's letter he read again on the embankment of a reservoir above the town, where there was a mile of moorland between him and the nearest road. A few black-faced sheep cropped the

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rare grass on the other shore of the loch, and sea gulls, on holiday from the roughnesses of the Firth, preened themselves on a brown bank of shingle at the mouth of the tributary stream. Malcolm had instinctively sought out this solitude: his rereading of that tremendous letter demanded a proper setting. For he had come to the moors not to debate the problems it raised, but to glory in its promise. He forgot his mother and her worries. He could realise only the compliment to himself and the heady wonder of the future. For hours he lay there in the July sunlight and dreamed of London.

About five in the evening he stirred himself to face the decisive task. Before six, his letter to Laidlaw had been written in his bedroom and posted in the red box outside the West Station. He listened anxiously to the momentous rustle of its fall among its fellows.

It was on his way home that he came face to face at last with the bleak necessity to tell his father and mother. His heart sank. But at the tea table that night sat his aunt, Mrs. Macroy, bursting with the particulars of the peculiarly painful death of old Mr. Menzies, the French polisher—*angina pectoris*.

“ . . . An’ he turned a’ blue, Nance, an’ he let out wan howl ye’d have heard at Paisley. Oh it was terrible affectin’!”

Malcolm assured himself comfortably that his announcement must wait till the morning; and

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when the morning came, his determination to face the issue had weakened. More than once at the breakfast table his mind plunged towards the act of announcement, but always he hesitated and swerved on the verge. Nursing a guilty conscience, but rapturous withal, he let the days pass by.

Young Malcolm shirked the issue even when his father came home two days later full of a new idea. In his capacity as lanternist, Mr. Tweedie was familiar with the scientific lights of the town, and he had had that morning a long talk with Dr. Forsyth. Inevitably the question of Malcolm's future had been raised by his father, and Dr. Forsyth had spoken of the Infirmary's pressing need for a temporary house surgeon.

"There ye are, then," said Mr. Tweedie. "The doctor would like to see you this afternoon. You might do worse, Malcolm. It's experience, ye see, experience. And it's fine and near home."

"O, that would be nice!" cried Mrs. Tweedie eagerly.

"All right," said Malcolm. "I'll go down and see him."

He went with a heart like lead. Now he realised into what a morass his idiotic reticence had led him. He would be shown up to his own father and mother for a fool, a weakling, a liar. When he came into the presence of the rotund little doctor he had to blurt out the truth, that he didn't want the job, that he had taken another.

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"But your father didn't mention that," quizzed Dr. Forsyth.

"I know. But you see—I was waiting. They don't want me to go away. They want me to settle down in practice. I'm all muddled."

Dr. Forsyth laughed and rubbed hands as if Malcolm had cracked a joke.

"I see. I see. There's a fine mess for you." Then he turned serious. "You go to London, my boy. Specialize, and go on specializing. You're too young in any case. I'll make it all right with your father."

He patted Malcolm out of the surgery. But Malcolm did not go straight home. He waited until it was certain that his father would be back for the evening meal; he could not face his mother alone. She was there to put her eager question to him.

"Have you taken the job in the Infirmary?"

"No."

He saw her face change and he looked away. His father peeped over the edge of the *Courier*.

"What's that, Malcolm?"

"Dr. Forsyth thinks I should go to London and do some research."

"He does, does he?" Mr. Tweedie ruminated on the idea: "I've a great respect for Dr. Forsyth," he added thoughtfully.

Malcolm sat down and undid the laces of his

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shoes. The act allowed him to hide his face and speak as if casually.

"I know of one good job I can get. With Gandy at St. Olave's. In fact, I got a letter about it the other day."

"You didn't tell us," observed Mr. Tweedie. He made no accusation. The remark was merely formal. He was grappling with the main proposition. His newspaper lay flat on his knee, and his eyes were on the fire. At length he spoke. "It's a fine thing study, right enough."

It was the Scot's declaration of faith: the high belief, so firmly held by a passing generation, that learning is a fine thing for its own sake. In that conviction peasants starved themselves that sons might wag their heads in pulpits, and sons carried to college the bag of oatmeal that stood between the student and starvation. A Scots-American millionaire, pushed to it to find a use for his insensate wealth, broke the tradition for good and all. But it lingered in Tom Tweedie, plumber and lanternist.

"It's a fine thing, study," he said.

"It's what I want to do," cried Malcolm, appealing to the student in his father.

"Mebbe you might do worse," said Mr. Tweedie.

Into the silence that followed there dropped the cool, inhospitable voice of Mrs. Tweedie:

"Tea's ready."

Nothing more was said on the matter that night.



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Malcolm made an excuse to go out again. He wanted to walk, and think, and rejoice in his tortuous victory. London: Gandy of St. Olave's. . . . It was wonderful. Yet he could not away with the thought of his mother and her silence. He pitied her now that she was down. She should never have obstructed him, but it hurt to think of her heartbreak. He wondered if she would not melt to him before he went away. And how terrible it was that every triumph of life must be scored at the expense of some other suffering soul!

### v

Symbolising crises in the lives of scores of people every day, the London Express leaves the Central Station at ten in the morning sharp. It is watched on its way out across the bridge by groups of women, weeping for the men it has taken away—sailors, soldiers, and those others whom fate has elected to do Scotland's share of the world's business. It is a train of adventure; and if the hearts of adventurers are high, the women know what signifies the whistle that sets the heavy Pullmans rolling towards the south.

His father, his mother and Gracie were there to see Malcolm off on a rainy morning of late September. They were early on the platform, and the disposal of Malcolm's modest luggage could not distract them from the dreariness of such partings.

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They stood in a forlorn group and talked, moving only when an arrogant porter aimed a barrow at their legs. Their talk was desultory, fatuous. There was so much to say that there could be no saying of it there, amid the public bustle of a station. Malcolm tried a wan facetiousness and failed to carry it off. Again and again his mother asked him if his parcel of sandwiches was safe, until her insistence scarified his strained nerves. Gracie, her face white and bewildered, was silent. Only Mr. Tweedie, aware of a great occasion, sought now and again to utter an appropriate sentiment.

"Well, Malcolm," he would begin. "It's a great day in your life, this ——"

But Mrs. Tweedie would quickly change the subject, and they would revert to trivialities. Malcolm kept his eye roving eagerly for a sign that this last trial was about to end.

The warning bell took them quite by surprise. It rang loudly, and Mrs. Tweedie jumped to a hasty, womanish conclusion that the train was about to depart without her son. She drew him tempestuously into her arms, and he felt her tears on his face. He recovered to find the wistful eyes of Gracie on him. His shyness went from him; he shut his eyes and kissed soft lips. The next he knew was that his father was simultaneously wringing his hand and pushing him into the train.

But still the train did not start. Nor was Malcolm able to stand at the window, which was already

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in the firm occupation of a large and talkative woman. He had to stand, for an eternity it seemed, grinning through the glass at two weeping women and an elderly man with his hat in his hand. The pathos of the tableau struck at his heart, so that he felt he must weep with them. Then he saw that their figures were receding. Frantically he waved. They passed from his sight. With a lump in his throat, Malcolm sought his window seat in a non-smoking compartment and pretended to find reading matter of extraordinary importance in the pages of the *Glasgow Herald*—as if a trip to London were a commonplace of his life. But though his eyes ranged the print industriously, his mind was busy with other things.

Throughout that long journey he read hardly a line in paper or book. His young imagination was grappling for the first time with the idea of responsibility. There came over him in his first loneliness a sense of his own inadequacy, of his own ignorance of this vast London towards which the express was thundering so fast. He wondered, wondered. All he knew was that he would work hard and do his best. There was Gracie to work for . . . and here the lump came back to his throat. His last sight of her, weeping on the platform at Glasgow, haunted him. But at least he had something, a great thing, to work for. His spirits rose again when he thought of the fine things he would see and do in the laboratories.

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All the time, his observant eyes were busy, eager and curious about country he had never seen before. Queer little sights aroused in him a vivid curiosity—a child waving from a cottage door, a slate roof glistening from the shoulder of a Lanarkshire hill, a porter wheeling cans along the platform of a small south-country station. He watched for the Border and missed it, realising that Scotland was behind him only when the train thundered across the Esk. He was out at Carlisle to hear the first English voices. He duly received the shock that every Scot receives on realising for the first time that houses in England may be built of plain red brick. In Scotland the brick is still a vulgar article. Then the flats of the Midlands vaguely oppressed him. His eye sought the horizon for the blue peaks of mountains and saw none.

In the late afternoon he began to weary of the endless rush through the leagues and leagues of country. When the train touched the northern-most fringes of London, he rose to prepare for the arrival, and it was a dreary hour that passed before the great train slid at last under Euston's mean roof and came to rest with a sigh. But he had arrived. He was tremendously excited by the fact. London . . . He could hear the voice of the city and feel in the air the eagerness of its crowding life. Almost jauntily he footed it down the platform, swinging his cheap suit case. He had been warned against accepting help in this dangerous place.

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Malcolm did not ask for guidance. He had studied and memorised the sectional map, and he knew how to reach the Y.M.C.A. hostel in Tottenham Court Road. He felt equal to London.

But when he came out past the War Memorial into the Euston Road he hesitated. Left or right? Just a momentary pause, but in that moment he was unmanned. It was raining and getting near darkness, and workers were hastening by the hundred into the stations. There passed before his dazed eyes a stream of fast-travelling cabs, great hurtling buses, and the lordly cars of the rich. It was all so busy, so hurried to his northern eyes, so intent of purpose. Malcolm became aware of London's vast indifference to the individual, and the awareness came over him like a chill. Yet once again the lump rose to his throat as he turned westward along the dingy thoroughfare of evil boarding houses and sculptors' yards.

## CHAPTER VII

### I

YOUNG Malcolm's preconceived notion of the life he would lead in London had been essentially uncomplicated. The joyful prospect of work had so completely filled his mind that other conditions of normal existence had never engaged his attention. But when, on that night of his arrival, he saw for the first time the lights of the city and heard its voice, there came over him a warm consciousness of that great London tradition every British boy unconsciously absorbs. He went out that evening to send a telegram home; and when, from the foot of Tottenham Court Road, he saw the bold lamps of Oxford Street and felt the press of life about him, he could not but remember that he was now of the world's greatest city and near to the mighty heart of a civilisation.

While he sat over his meal in the hostel he planned an expedition. The project had in his mind the significance of a dark adventure. He ate hurriedly in his excitement. As he stepped out into the drizzle of the evening, he was excited by the impact on his nostrils of the London smell, that unmistakable

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blend of the odours of petrol, cigarette smoke, and face powder. Eagerly he turned south. His plan was to do the grand tour of Oxford Street, Regent Street, the Circus, Haymarket, Pall Mall, Trafalgar Square, and Charing Cross Road. He had studied the sectional map.

There was a block outside the Underground station. He had to wait. His innocent eyes gloated on the brilliant sky signs—red and yellow and green, flickering and jazzing above the streets. He found that they excited him strangely. He forgot to cross when the road was clear again. Suddenly he was startled. A rough man had stopped behind him, close to his left shoulder. The man whispered hoarsely, confidentially. . . . Malcolm did not comprehend the Cockney speech. He was not even quite certain that he was being addressed. But he suffered an uncomfortable spasm of revulsion. Somehow the contact had been foul. Instinctively he darted across the road and reached the island just as the falling arm of the policeman, releasing the down-flowing stream of traffic, put a barrier between him and the man who had whispered hoarsely.

Malcolm stood for a minute at the northwestern corner of the Circus. And now the lighted cleft of Oxford Street had somehow lost its allure. There were the redolent signs—FRASCATI and NEW OXFORD. But beyond? A little shiver of fear came over Malcolm. He felt again the bleakness of the



city's apparent inhospitality. Blindly he turned towards the north.

Malcolm's walk up Tottenham Court Road was rapid. Soon he discovered that it is a thoroughfare without nobility, a street that is almost mean. It reminded him unpleasantly of the Trongate in Glasgow, and the nearness of poverty was depressing to him who had dreamed so recently of London's wealth and luxury. Lower and lower sank his spirits as he passed by the black groves of Mornington Crescent, before the strange stucco fronts of alien houses, through the groups of women drinking stout outside the flashy public houses. He was disgusted when at length he saw in Camden Town an English butcher at work. The apron of the man was soaked in blood, his arms were smeared a raw, bright red, and always he bawled hoarsely as if drunk, like a fanatic beside the guillotine, with the feral lusts of flesh.

From that devastating spectacle Malcolm fled precipitate. His panic gave him courage to board an omnibus. It took him back to the hostel so quickly and in such a civilised way that he laughed at himself when he emerged through the swing doors into the gentle atmosphere of brotherhood.

But it was on the whole a depressing evening. He fidgeted about the smoke-room and read the evening papers that others had left behind after sitting on them. They left poor Malcolm bleaker of spirit than ever, these sheets. They lacked the comforting

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quality of parochialism. Then he had a desultory hour with the *Century Magazine*, the *Hibbert Journal* and the *Autocar*—for yet he could not bring himself to go early to bed in London. And then there was a passage with the hall porter, who could not understand his Scots tongue and who, as the argument developed, plainly thought him a fool.

Malcolm slept ill that night. He knew himself to be a stranger in a strange land. It was all a little bit dreary. He thought of his mother and father, and how they would be thinking anxiously of him. He wept then, confessing defeat.

Nineteen hours later he had recovered his good spirits. His first day in the laboratory at St. Olave's reassured him. They were all friendly, his new associates, all clearly prepared to make him one of themselves. There were house jokes over tea in the afternoon, and Malcolm found himself expected to share them. Gandy, preoccupied but lucid, put him to an experiment that promised to be elaborate and significant. Thoughtfully the great man watched Malcolm assemble his apparatus.

"That's right," he muttered at length. "You've got the knack. Carry on, boy."

Such joy! To be approved at once: to be told unreservedly to carry on as his own sense dictated! He lost himself. Then, in the evening, a cheerful young man named Crompton walked home with him and advised him to find decent digs. Crompton would actually go round with him and see that he

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wasn't swindled. Old sharks, the landladies of Bloomsbury. It amazed Malcolm that Crompton should interest himself thus, for the man was plainly of good breeding, a gentleman. It emerged that Crompton's father was a doctor in Kensington. Malcolm thrilled responsively to the democratic cheerfulness of the Londoner. A Scot, he knew, would have remained watchful for weeks, unbending grudgingly. He hoped that he was not stiff, and feared very much that he was.

So Malcolm dared to penetrate on his second night in London the mystery that had scared him as a fledgling. He had discovered that the secret of safety in London is never to loiter. That night, the crowds in the street excited him pleurably, while the rush of vehicles, dominated by the great buses and the virtuosi who drove them, gave him a thrilling sense of drive and good purpose in the city's affairs. He cherished a reserve only against the slinking women whose painted faces stared at him with a sort of insolent invitation. It hurt some racial sense in him to see among the people in these lighted streets so many Jews in clothes altogether too fashionable. Otherwise, those first breaths of London's infectious atmosphere went to his head, so that he felt a queer pride in pushing his way along the pavements. He thought that the great, white, new buildings of Regent Street were very fine indeed.

As he came near to Piccadilly Circus his eye was

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caught and held by a sign which marked the historic premises of the Café Royal. The noble name was to him, somehow, more alluring than any other he had encountered. Surely he had read somewhere . . . Then he knew that he had, by one of London's divine accidents, come upon one of London's sacred places. He felt that he must go in and claim his place among the citizens. He passed the commissionaire and through the revolving doors in Windmill Street as if to the manner born.

The geography of the old lounge of the Café Royal confused him at first. It was his instinct to take the first seat he encountered in the outer lounge, but the clamour of conversation and the tinkle of glasses ahead took him through the second door to the gilded chamber of the legend. The clatter of conversation from the plush settees was like a blow in the face, yet he plunged ahead and sidled into an empty place at the end of a settee near the bar. He was awed by his proximity to a hairy and voluble person in a wide-awake hat, explaining to a girl with short hair that a man called John was grossly overrated. Malcolm did not follow the allusion. Then he discovered to his confusion that an indifferent waiter stood above him, waiting for his order.

He demanded a port. The quick instinct of the sensitive told him that a ginger ale would be out of order here. When the waiter returned, wiping the bottom of the glass on his apron, Malcolm dis-

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covered that the drink cost twice as much as he had expected to pay for it. Life in London was not to be enjoyed cheaply. But he handed the man a florin and waved away the change. He could rise as well as any to London's challenge.

He took away from the Café Royal no more than a blurred impression. Smoke, and lean-faced men in wide-awake hats, and sallow, short-haired girls, girls who were obviously proud of their shapely legs. He wondered, chuckling, what his mother would think. What, after all, would Gracie think? But it had been great, great.

He went back then to Tottenham Court Road. The Strand and Piccadilly, fabled thoroughfares, could wait till to-morrow. He had done something towards his conquest of London.

## II

When Malcolm came down for breakfast next morning he found sitting next him at table a young man of expansive manners. About thirty-five, his neighbour was smartly dressed, as Malcolm thought, in a black jacket and striped trousers with a wide-winged collar and a handsome tie. Briskly he nodded to Malcolm, laid aside his newspaper, and embarked on conversation.

The stranger was also a Scot, it transpired, but one—he insisted—who knew London like the back of his hand. He was actually in London for a week

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in every month; he hinted at some years of residence in the metropolis in early life. Chocolates: that was his line. He travelled in chocolates for Bottomley's. (Here he handed Malcolm a card, which read: "D. A. Carstairs Macandrew, Scottish Representative, Bottomley's Chocolates, Ltd.") Having thus established his identity Mr. Macandrew went on to speak knowledgeably of night journeys to the north, of Pullmans, of the state of trade. He recalled the days when his round included Ireland. But the Sinn Fein swine had spoiled all that. Mr. Macandrew would have shot the lot. And he animadverted on the difficult communications in the Orkneys.

"You know what it is?" he observed fraternally.

Malcolm was not slow to take his cue. He was very proud of his new and permanent association with London, and he explained himself fully to Mr. Macandrew.

"Ah, well," said Mr. Macandrew, "you're new to it. I could learn you a thing or two about London. If you're thinking of going up West . . ."

He let it be inferred that the romantic possibilities of the West End were of extraordinary richness. Then with a "P'raps I'll see you again," he was off. Malcolm picked up his discarded newspaper and forgot about Mr. Macandrew.

But that smooth and rather weak face was there to greet him in the evening. Mr. Macandrew had had a good day. He told Malcolm in detail what



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the Managing Director had said by way of commendation of the Scottish Representative. Mr. Macandrew was properly modest, but he let it be understood that it was a Big Thing.

"I don't mind telling you in confidence," he said, "but it'll be worth three hundred a year to me."

Malcolm was by now somewhat suspicious of this aplomb, of the small eyes of Mr. Macandrew and their sandy lashes. The man repelled him, but the youth could not help being impressed by the manner and the experience of life it implied.

"That's jolly fine!" he said enthusiastically.

"Not too bad," admitted Mr. Macandrew. He paused. Then: "What about a little celebration? Doing anything to-night?"

"No, I'm quite free," said Malcolm.

"Right! We'll just have a wee trot round. I'll show you a thing or two."

They went out together into a soft autumn night. For a moment Mr. Macandrew paused thoughtfully, swinging an umbrella very neatly rolled. His smartness—a bowler hat and a waisted coat—was a reproach to Malcolm. He announced at length the result of his self-communion.

"We might as well push down to the Circus and see what the girls are doing."

Young Malcolm had to follow. He went unwillingly. That pretentious phrase with its cheap assumption of gallantry, let him see very clearly into the poor little soul of his compatriot. From the



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first he was fortified by that cynical realisation against the most sensational situation into which the traveller for chocolates might lead him.

Mr. Macandrew led the way down Charing Cross Road and was explanatory, as to a country cousin, of the bookshops, the Palace Theatre of Varieties, and the dark streets leading towards Seven Dials. He let it be understood that in these lanes he, Mr. Macandrew, had figured in dramatic scenes. The police and several vague ladies figured in his reminiscences. Those were the good old days. But Mr. Macandrew had settled down. He spoke sentimentally of a wife in Uddingston. Nevertheless he nudged Malcolm and jerked a knowing head when they passed the small crowded window of a shop devoted, very blatantly, to the sale of surgical requisites.

There was less opportunity for conversation in Shaftesbury Avenue, packed with loungers and the theatre crowds. Malcolm forgot Mr. Macandrew in his awed study of lighted windows that displayed dresses of incredibly daring colour. Then an ambulance passed up the road, its bell clanging dramatically. A man in a strait-waistcoat was giving a performance in a lane beside the Shaftesbury Theatre. They reached the doors of the Trocadero before Mr. Macandrew could embark again on the pleasant business of recapitulation.

"There's the good old Troc!" he cried. "Many's the day . . ."

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They stood in Piccadilly Circus for a time, pallid under its restless lights. It came over Malcolm that the gallantry of Mr. Macandrew was not quite so dangerous as he had anticipated. London's huge market of white slaves seemed to be passing in deliberate procession before them, jaunty, chalk-faced and friendly, yet the hero of countless affairs did not meet the challenge of those slant eyes and red-gashed mouths. Malcolm had a momentary vision of Mr. D. A. Carstairs Macandrew as ludicrous and painfully respectable in his bowler hat and dark coat. At last his companion moved.

"I think we'll go back," said Mr. Macandrew, almost desperately remembering his promise of vivid entertainment. "There's a wee pub off Dean Street."

Malcolm was led through unfamiliar mean streets into a crowded bar. Its patrons surprised him who had just beheld the superficial elegance of the main thoroughfares. Here were dark men with heavy jowls and black hats drawn down over brutal or sly faces. Some of them wore tweed caps and sweaters with rolled collars, as if their business was with horses. There was a Jew here and there, fat and sallow. But the customers of the place were mainly women—women of the streets, tarnished and a little pathetic now, massed at the counter drinking. It seemed as if the place was a headquarters of prostitution, and even Malcolm could guess at a

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horrible association between the heavy men and the girls. He wanted to run out at once.

"This is the stuff," said Mr. Macandrew ecstatically in his ear. "What's yours?"

They drank port after Macandrew had made himself heard at the clamorous bar. Indeed, the noise of the place was maddening to Malcolm. He could hardly hear what his companion said, and he had to shout till his head ached. They stood back against the wall and watched the scene, on which Mr. Macandrew commented with a sort of awed enthusiasm.

"A great place, this," he said. "You're seeing life now, my lad, eh?"

Malcolm saw that Mr. Macandrew, fired by his glass of port, had taken to exchanging gay glances with two girls who stood together by the counter. His heart sank. Those two girls had attracted his own eye, for one was prominent in a bright red hat, and both seemed to him depressingly tawdry. He did not know what he should do. He felt that he must do something. But all concentration passed from him in the crisis. The girls moved towards them, grinning. The girl in the red hat had a wide, foolish smile. There was a black gap in her brown teeth.

"Hullo, dearie!" came the inevitable greeting.

"Hullo, Flossie!" Mr. Macandrew responded jocularly.

So it began, the ancient, fatuous exchange of

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catchwords. The girls were eager in the chase; they had quickly grasped the implications of the Scots accent. Mr. Macandrew was a shade heavier in the game than he had led Malcolm to believe, but he achieved a fair degree of pawkiness. As for poor Malcolm, he was dumb. He found himself asked to speak a language of which he knew nothing. He smiled; he nodded; he even tried to make an appreciative laugh heard above the babel. But there was no laughter in him, only sickness and revulsion from the wide, slack smile of the girl in the red hat. At length she turned on him directly. Her shabbily gloved hand stroked his cheek.

"What about a drink, kid?"

"Oh, yes," he stammered. "What about it?"

They would have port. And the same for Mr. Macandrew. Malcolm was glad to be released from their company in order to struggle at the bar.

He was not good at bars. Sterner men kept shouldering their way between him and the barmaid. When he did catch that busy woman's indifferent eye, he could not make himself understood. At last:

"Four-r-r por-r-rts!" she mocked, loudly rolling the r's so that her admirers might laugh in appreciation of her wit.

While he waited there in humility, Malcolm jumped to the fall of a hearty hand on his shoulder. He swung round and looked into a white shirt front and then up into the quizzical face of Crompton.

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He felt the blood rushing to his head. Crompton spoke sharply.

"Come over here a minute. I want to speak to you."

Malcolm indicated the glasses, the change he was waiting for, and the group against the wall.

"Take your change," said Crompton briskly, "I'll settle the other lot."

In a daze Malcolm heard Crompton address the ladies and Mr. Macandrew courteously but firmly.

"Will you excuse your friend for a moment? I want him to meet my brother."

Then he felt himself marched down the room through the crush and out by a side door into the street. Again he was dumb. It was all so confusing—Crompton in evening dress and bareheaded, Crompton's double beside him, and himself torn so swiftly from the clutch of the two ladies. And Crompton was angry.

"What the devil are you playing at, you young ass?"

Malcolm tried to laugh it off.

"Where did you spring from?" he asked.

Crompton was taking a breather from the theatre round the corner. But he was not to be distracted from his work of rescue.

"Mucking about pubs in Soho with tarts! You young ass! You don't know what you're doing."

"But I couldn't help it!" Even to himself it sounded feeble.

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"Couldn't help it, be blowed! What about your work, you ass? And such a rotten couple of tarts, too!"

It was a painful explanation that Malcolm had to make, and particularly difficult in the face of Crompton's intolerant indignation. But it was weakness rather than vice, he had to admit, and Crompton softened at length. He laughed.

"The sooner you're in digs the better, old boy. Can't have one of Gandy's men fooling about like that. Better cut off home. See you to-morrow."

Malcolm went gladly. He did not in the least regret his desertion of Mr. Macandrew. And his young heart warmed in gratitude to Crompton, who had done the business so competently, so generously.

One of Gandy's men! There was a place for him in London after all.

### III

To supervise the affairs of one's fellow creatures is an insidious form of self-flattery, and no doubt Jim Crompton found pleasure in assuming benevolent control of Malcolm's life. Yet there was little but genuine kindness in the heart of this big, laughing young man, with his craggy features, his spectacles, and his upstanding mop of auburn hair. Why he took so warmly to Malcolm was a mystery Malcolm could never solve. Crompton played forward for St. Olave's; Crompton often came to the

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lab in a car; Crompton was of the public-school sort. He was altogether of a world to which Malcolm, in his humility, would never have dared to aspire. Yet they became friends.

It started definitely with a search for lodgings in the coloured twilight of an October evening. For this tour of exploration Crompton had prepared elaborately. He had bought a copy of *Dalton's Weekly*, and had laboriously searched its crowded columns till he had a likely list made out. A route was plotted on a pocket map of London—"Nothing like careful staff work," said Crompton. They set out through the austere streets and squares of Bloomsbury towards the first address in Bedford Place.

"You leave this to me, young fellow-me-lad," said Crompton vigorously.

Malcolm was happy to do so. He realised, when he listened to Crompton's brisk exchanges with landladies, when he heard Crompton's critical observations on various rooms and their furnishings, that it was a task beyond his own capacities. Himself indifferent to domestic environment, it seemed all the more wonderful that Crompton should be so painstaking on his behalf. The debt began to weigh heavily on his earnest young mind. He was relieved indeed when he was handed over at last to the care of a grey, quiet widow in Guilford Street, near Gray's Inn Road.

"Not a bad little spot, as bed-sitting rooms go,"



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observed Crompton with satisfaction when Mrs. Mottram had silently disappeared. "Trams, trains and buses within easy reach. The British Museum down the road. The Royal Free across the way if you fall out of the window. Foundlings' Hospital next door should you get into trouble with the landlady's daughter. Not bad, I'll say. You can work here."

"You bet," cried Malcolm. "But I say, Crompton, it's far too good of you."

"You'll get the bill to-morrow. Shut up and come along to the Y.M.C.A. for your bits of duds."

They made a night of it. Crompton's cheerfulness insisted on a celebration. He took Malcolm to a restaurant in Soho, where they dined on exotic dishes—*hors d'œuvres* and macaroni and veal cutlets and zabaglioni, very strange and savoury. They had a half-litre flask of red Chianti, but it was too sour for Malcolm, and Crompton drank most of it. Malcolm did not require the stimulus of alcohol. He was absurdly happy. It was so good for his lonely little soul to be met in honest companionship by a man of his own age. He swaggered over the coffee, leaning negligently against the wall and smoking gracefully, as if he wished the world to recognise him as one of Gandy's men.

Crompton was gloriously talkative. He was seldom anything else, but now the wine warmed him, and he enlarged on work and life. Work. The lab was all very well, but somehow it wasn't work. You

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had only your scholarship and a nominal wage, and if you were lucky Gandy gave you a job, lecturing to fatheads of dental students. To what end?

"Look at my old dad," said Crompton. "A big practice—far too big for him. And a panel up to the limit. It's by no means what they call a fashionable practice—mainly poor people in Chelsea and the back of Walham Green. The old boy's hardly ever in his bed. But it's honest work, my lad, and there's cash in it. I've a jolly good mind to chuck this research bunkum and take on a job as his assistant."

"Och, away!" Malcolm was genuinely shocked.

"Fact, my lad. You'll do it yourself some day."

"Not I!"

"Yes, you will. Marriage—what about that? Some rotten little flapper'll come along and knock you off the rails. Then you'll be jolly glad to go into practice and turn an honest penny like a decent man, instead of mucking about, looking in frog's bellies for things old Gandy dreamed about the night before."

This was blasphemy, and "Oh, I don't know," said Malcolm. But something stabbed him when he thought of Gracie. It was certainly difficult. He fell silent and let Crompton talk. But he did not hear, for he was wondering . . .

They left the restaurant about nine and strolled down Shaftesbury Avenue, with Crompton still didactic about life. At the Circus they parted,

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shaking hands vigorously. If Crompton's fervour was prompted partly by alcohol and a sense of charitable accomplishment, Malcolm was almost painfully sincere. He loved old Crompton with his cheeriness and his endearing lunacy. He was grateful for an introduction to a friendly, normal life. It had, in short, been a Great Night.

Crompton cut short his halting phrase of thanks.

"Cut it out, old man. I'll be round to Guildford Street to-morrow afternoon to see you settled in."

He came, and he came again, until it was the fixed custom of these two to walk along to Malcolm's room every afternoon at five and brew tea on a gas ring. Malcolm provided the gas, the tea and the crockery; Crompton was resourceful in the matter of biscuits and cakes. They talked at length—often of the specific jobs of the day, always of the careers that lay before them. They were young. And Crompton never failed to advance his favourite argument.

"All very fine and large, this research stunt, but you won't buy rusks for the baby out of it. Chuck it as soon as you can, my son. I'm going to."

"Rot!" Malcolm would say lightly. He had come to regard this gambit as one of Crompton's stock jests.

"Not on your life! It's dead truth. You come along and see my old dad. . . ."

"I'll bet your old dad envies you."

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"Not he! He knows a feather bed when he's on it."

So it went on, night after night.

### IV

It was through Crompton that Malcolm came to make his first contacts with family life in London. He went down one Sunday afternoon to meet that "old dad" so frequently and affectionately referred to as an authority. Malcolm went eagerly, for he had gathered that his friend's mother was dead and that his only sister, "young Madge," was at school somewhere.

He had some trouble in finding the house in the dusk of a dull afternoon in December. Kensington is the vastest and most featureless conglomeration of respectable residences in the world. Finally, when his feet were sore, he came to the house, a lofty and narrow unit of a uniform series that stretched along the four sides of a dreary square. His heart beat quickly as he entered at the bidding of a smart maid. He was not used to smart, efficient maids, nor yet to oak settees and space. But Crompton, clattering down the steep stairs, came to put him at his ease.

"Heave your duds anywhere. We're just going to have tea."

In a great room on the first floor, discreetly lighted by one reading lamp, Malcolm shook hands

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with Dr. Crompton. It was like shaking hands through a partition. Dr. Crompton was kindly but aloof. When he sat down again, it was to relapse into private musings. He smiled occasionally, as if the garrulity of his son had broken not unpleasantly into his solitude. He had nothing to say, but yet his presence was friendly. He was, to Malcolm, like a benevolent old man who keeps his counsel and smiles on the folly of youth. Nevertheless, Dr. Crompton was not an old man. Clean-shaven, thin-faced, Malcolm took him to be in the late fifties.

When tea was brought by the smart maid, Malcolm observed that Dr. Crompton drank one cup, ate half a biscuit, then turned to the cigarette that was still burning. He rolled his own cigarettes—kept rolling them, as it seemed to Malcolm. And still he said nothing. Happily, his son was able to talk incessantly. It was only when young Crompton spoke with enthusiasm of an experiment he was working out for Gandy, that the father broke in impatiently.

“All rot, my dear boy. Medicine is the most empirical hoodoo in civilisation. Pink mixtures and faith—that’s all there is to it.”

His son laughed, but Malcolm was strangely impressed by that fantastic statement. There was a terrible bitterness in it. Throughout the evening, with a mixed emotion of sympathy and fear, he

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watched Dr. Crompton. Young Crompton was content to go on talking while he watched.

The quiet winter evening passed quickly enough. Malcolm had calculated that it would be good manners to leave about six; he was surprised when a gong rang downstairs and a grandfather clock on the landing struck seven.

"Supper!" cried young Crompton. "Come on, my lad!"

"I ought to be going," Malcolm protested.

"Listen to him, dad!"

Malcolm was dazed into submission. The social ease of these people made him feel helpless, ashamed. He suffered himself to be led downstairs into a huge brown dining room with a heavy table in the centre of it. It interested him to observe that Dr. Crompton appeared to brighten at the sight of food.

"Cold lamb, Tweedie, or a slice of chicken?" he invited briskly. "Help yourself to potato salad. There's chutney at your elbow. Cut some bread, Jim. Barsac for you boys, I suppose?"

Barsac, Malcolm discovered at this first encounter with it, was quite a pleasant beverage, but he was held by the fact that Dr. Crompton preferred whisky. He could not help watching. Twice in the course of the meal Dr. Crompton filled himself out a half tumbler of whisky, to which he added the merest dash of soda. His eyes grew bright. He began to talk. Malcolm noticed that the hand lift-

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ing the glass shook briskly. He felt himself in the presence of another's dark secret. Young Crompton had fallen silent and was glancing at his father.

"No more Barsac, Tweedie!" Dr. Crompton urged. "Come on, for God's sake, drink!"

It seemed unnecessarily vehement. His host laid his hand again on the decanter.

"Steady on, governor!" Young Crompton's voice was grave.

"All right, old lad, I've got no major operations to-morrow. They don't come the way of the G. P. Pink mixture—that's my line, damn it." He took a long, voracious pull at his glass. "You young cubs with your research! Rot, my dear boys. Pink mixtures and chance it. They'll die anyhow. What does it matter?"

It was not jocularly; there was a dark ferocity in the outburst. Malcolm was incapable of meeting the situation. He was glad when young Crompton rose and said he must get to work: some notes to pull together for the morning. It surprised Malcolm, whose simple mind was stunned by the drama of the situation, that his friend did not mention his father as they said good night. Young Crompton, indeed, spoke lightly of the future.

"I say, old man, my sister's coming home next week, and I'll have to take her out dancing. Will you make up a party one night. Shove on a boiled shirt and we'll invade a dancing shop in Soho."

"Thanks. That'll be fine."



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Malcolm did not realise what he was saying. His mind was too full of the case of Dr. Crompton. As he walked home he brooded very miserably on that case. It seemed to him a parable, significant. A successful man, according to the world's standards, embittered by the monotony and fatuity of his job; then whisky. Malcolm had been sensitised more than he knew by young Crompton's jibes at specialism. He could appreciate the truth of the jibe: poverty and obscurity, in whatever service, were heartbreaking, and monotonous. But here was the converse. Was there no happy mean? It was all very perplexing and oppressive.

### v

Malcolm awoke next morning to the more immediate problems raised by his rash promise to go dancing with Crompton and his sister. It was not merely that he knew his dancing to be of a peculiarly lumpish order: there was that question of dress clothes. He had none. His training rebelled against the expense. There was money enough, for he had saved something, but he understood that dress clothes were fabulously expensive. He argued with himself that a young man in London must have dress clothes. Then he knew that he would feel an idiot in them. He recoiled from the simple task of walking into a tailor's and ordering the garments. And behind it all there was the dominant realisation

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that he had committed himself and lacked the social courage to confess the poverty of his equipment.

In the end, through the advertisement columns of an evening paper, Malcolm selected a tailor. The establishment of Mr. Silver was in the Strand. Mr. Silver boasted of sartorial services rendered to Mr. Steve Donoghue and other prominent people. He was willing to clothe the man-in-the-street in evening dress, as supplied to the famous, for ten guineas. By one of Mr. Silver's slick assistants Malcolm was appropriately tailored and advised as to the proper neckwear to be worn with a dinner jacket. "White tie with tails only"—the shibboleth drummed through Malcolm's mind for days on end. And there were other extras; nearly three pounds for the lot. Once embarked on the enterprise, however, Malcolm went recklessly ahead, though he drew the line at a gibus.

The night came when he waited outside a mean door in Great Pulteney Street for Crompton, his sister, and their friend to appear. Save for the rasping of a high collar at his neck, he felt surprisingly well and clean in his new clothes.

The sudden appearance of the two young ladies from a car flabbergasted him. He had never come into close contact with creatures quite so brilliant. They wore bright cloaks of rich stuff, falling from naked shoulders; their skirts hung to their kneecaps and no further, and they radiated perfume of a

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heady sort. There were no sober introductions such as Malcolm was prepared to endure.

"Lead me to the cocktails," said Miss Crompton at once. He recognised his friend's sister by the auburn brilliance of her close-cropped hair.

For the next hour or so, Malcolm sought vainly to ride a whirlwind, but the Saucy Kitten Club was too much for him. But six months before it had been a warehouse, yet Malcolm was overwhelmed by its discreet lighting, by the elaborately Bohemian garb of the dirty Italian waiters, by the air of clandestine smartness about the place. They dined on a balcony above the dancing-floor. At the tiny tables round them, excited young women of the suburbs laughed and giggled over sweet liqueurs, and Malcolm believed them to be authentic members of the Smart Set. The band below consisted of a piano and a drum—Malcolm felt that it competed in verve with the Savoy Bands he had heard over the wireless. Peeping over the rails, he saw that the revolving couples downstairs embraced closely. They indulged, most of them, in a step that seemed to Malcolm indecently suggestive—a sort of close, jigging movement that suggested to his medical mind a serious attack of the St. Vitus malady. Miss Crompton, at his side, was calling for another Manhattan.

It was fast: that was all there was about it. Fast. Malcolm thought of his mother.

So overwhelmed was he by this environment that

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his slender gifts of conversation deserted him utterly. He wanted to stare. Then he discovered that the type of conversation in which Miss Crompton and her friend delighted was of the sort exchanged by comedians in musical comedy. Malcolm had no instinct for catchwords. He was dumb, and he knew that he was failing socially, and the realisation silenced him all the more effectively. He could not help noticing the pitying, amused side glances of the girls. Once they exchanged a critical grimace at his expense. Even the garrulity of Crompton could not hold back the chill that was falling on the party. And he would have to attempt to dance with these chits!

When they went downstairs at last, Malcolm, walking ahead, heard what Miss Crompton asked indignantly of her brother.

"And where in Heaven's name did you get that poor fish?"

"Don't be a little prig." Crompton was angry.

But the blow had fallen. Malcolm could have wept. He had let his friend down; he had been found out as a low-caste impostor. A keelie . . . he remembered that word. Suddenly and violently he was overcome by a longing to be with Gracie, who was kind and unpretentious.

But he had to dance. He had, with his heart heavy, to go through with it.

"Just a sec till I pull up my socks," said Miss Crompton coolly.

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It was a deliberate insult. She pulled her light skirts above her knees and twisted a saucy garter of pink and black satin. He could have kicked her for it. Then she stretched her arms for him to take her, more like one who commits herself to providence than a healthy girl surrendering to the spirit of the dance.

It was a hideous five minutes. He blundered hopelessly. If he was not stamping on her toes, he was swinging her into another couple. Not for two consecutive seconds could he make his movements accord with the easy curves of his partner.

"Sorry," he said again and again.

"Oh, for God's sake let us sit down!" she snapped at last, biting her red lips.

She walked haughtily before him to the table.

"You're a bit out of practice, aren't you, what?" she asked in a loud, cold, insolent voice. And he could not answer her.

The party left early. Everybody's night had been spoiled. It was Miss Crompton's mood to stay and torture her easy victim.

"Oh, Mr. Tweedie would be the better of some practice," she would say.

But her brother was angry. He made some futile excuse and sent the girls away for their cloaks.

"So pleased to have met you, Mr. Tweedie," said Miss Crompton acidly, and the car swept away, leaving Malcolm forlorn and tearful on the empty pavement of the windy street.

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It was his last attempt to enter the social world of London alone. He could not be absorbed. London, like a courtesan, demands of her wooers cash and glibness, and Malcolm had none of these things. So he remained outside the doors, an alien and alone.

It hurt his vanity, this social failure, and he needed friends and sociability. But he was of a race and class that suffers long. And he had something—the gay but steadfast friendship of Crompton, the quiet comfort of his room in Bloomsbury, and work. Mainly work—and the letters of Gracie. These were dear and private possessions, inextricably associated in his heart of hearts.

## CHAPTER VIII

### I

CARLISLE, Beattock, Carstairs, Hamilton—eagerly he marked the passing of these last milestones on his road home. He had travelled all night so that he might enjoy every possible minute of the first long summer vacation in Scotland. It had been a quiet journey, and he had contrived to sleep most of the way; and when he wakened about seven to behold the flat stretch of the Solway under the morning sunlight, he forgot the misery of a night out of bed in the sheer, unreasonable joy of returning to his native land. The red sandstone of Dumfriesshire, the golden moors and green hills of the Lanarkshire uplands, the clamorous burns, the black-faced sheep, the great Clydesdale horses in the fields, the Ayrshire cows—it was all wonderful and moving in his rare moment of sentiment. Even the dirty industrial towns of the Clyde Valley enchanted him with their homeliness. He was on his feet when the express rushed through Rutherglen on the last lap of its tremendous journey. And there was Gracie on the platform to greet him!

Then a chill came over Malcolm. There was



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something wrong. Her kiss was fierce and lingering and she laughed, but he was aware of a subtle imperfection in their reunion. Was it something in her eyes, or in the tone of her voice? She chattered as they walked down the platform to the barrier, but he was wondering dumbly why his so fervent anticipations had been dashed thus. Clear of the stream of traffic, he spoke to her timidly.

"Gracie—what's wrong?"

"Wrong!" Her tone was abrupt. "Not just now. Nothing . . ."

He was to have had breakfast with her in St. George's Road, but she paused when they came to the door of a restaurant in Gordon Street.

"Do you mind taking your breakfast here, Malcolm?" she asked him miserably. "Everything's all wrong at home. I couldn't . . ."

It was disheartening. He, ravenous, took no pleasure in the bacon and eggs, while she, her eyes mournful, let her cup of tea grow cold. They were too young, too inexperienced in a crisis, to bridge the emotional gap with gossip, and they sat silent.

"But what's wrong, Gracie?" he asked her more than once, and she could only gaze at him with mournful eyes and shake her head.

Then it came out suddenly. Her father, Peter Mackenzie, had announced that morning his intention of marrying at an early date the widow, Mrs. Grigor.

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"And you'll give her the respect she's due, ma girl," he had intimated to Gracie.

It was calamitous. Malcolm grasped at once the enormity of the hurt, not merely to the womanish pride of Gracie, but to her deepest emotions. There was something vulgar and wanton about Mrs. Grigor. They had often agreed in their shocked dislike of the woman. And now Gracie was to resign to her the control of a household, was to spend most hours of every day in her unpleasant company, was to call that woman "mother."

"I won't! I can't!" she snapped. "I'll run away."

"But you can't, Gracie," he protested.

"I can and I will. That beastly woman!"

What could he say? She would not in that moment listen to advice from him, even to comfort; to offer either was to risk banishment from her regard.

"We'll have to think, Gracie," he suggested mildly.

"Oh, think! What's the good of thinking? The thing's there, and I'm not going to stand it. That hideous creature!"

She directed her personal indignation against him, and he was silenced, but her petulance aroused in him no malice. He understood; he wanted terribly to soothe, to help her. If only she would let him! But they parted distantly, and he could conjure up nothing wherewith to melt her.

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This first grave encounter with the maddening complexities of life brought extreme misery to Malcolm. In the local train going home, it occurred to him that one way of escape for Gracie lay in marriage with himself. The thought was merely depressing. It was ludicrously impossible. If he had only gone into a proper job with a proper salary!

"Oh, damn!" sighed Malcolm bleakly.

He fell to wondering if his mother could not do anything for Gracie. There was room in Mountjoy Street. Should he throw up his post at St. Olave's? He began to realise more and more bitterly that the matrimonial inclinations of Peter Mackenzie affected himself directly, and very warmly he resented the act. It was not fair. That hateful woman!

His unhappiness developed into alarm when, three days later, a letter in correct business English from the prospective bridegroom invited him to assist at the ceremony. Immediately Malcolm's mind jumped to the possibility of a scene, and to the extreme painfulness of scenes in general. Another part of his brain was busy simultaneously with apprehensive thoughts of silk hats and morning coats. So far, indeed, were the social aspects of the occasion beyond him that he was forced to take Mrs. Tweedie into his confidence. His mother was greatly flattered by the approach and impressed

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by the nice questions of social procedure raised. She pronounced judgment deliberately.

"Ye'll have to go, Malcolm," she said, nodding a grave head. "It would never do to keep away. It would be a terrible slap in the face to them. And there's Gracie—ye'd never let her think ye were ashamed of her father. No, ye'll have to go." She paused judicially and added, "We'll have to get them a present. But she's got a house full of stuff already."

He had to go, as he had known from the first. There were no scenes. It was all very dull and a trifle awkward. Miss Mackenzie approved of the match no more warmly than Gracie, and the self-consciousness of the women caused a certain tenseness in the atmosphere of the parlour in St. George's Road. Mrs. Dinwiddie and her son were incapable of brightening up the proceedings, and the bridegroom, impeccably sober on his wedding day, seemed to be aware of the attitude of his relations, and to resent it dully. Only the bride and the best man, the flautist with the defective palate, were gay, and their archness rang false against the respectable sobriety of the majority of the group. A colorless minister went through the service expeditiously, prayed with somewhat excessive fervour for the happiness of Peter Mackenzie and his wife, proposed the health of the bride in the hideously facetious terms reserved by the clergy for such occasions, and departed. There was another

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glass of wine all round: a pretence of traditional merriment when the mature celebrants departed; some metallic and abortive attempts by the flautist to make a day of it: and all was over.

Then Malcolm was left to deal with the problem of Gracie. He had the sensible instinct to hurry her off by train to Milngavie, whence they walked over the hills to Strathblane. She said little while they walked, for she was brooding darkly, and he was hard put to it to distract her. Once or twice on the way she broke out, protesting against an intolerable imposition; and when she most fiercely demanded by suggestion his help, he found himself most helpless. There was one way out—and he could not offer it. In his desperation he invented a scheme whereby she should learn shorthand and typewriting. At least it would take her from the company of her stepmother for most of the day. Then she would get a job. Shorthand and typewriting . . .

On this theme Malcolm expanded more and more elaborately as the day wore on. As they walked down the steep hill into the glen, when the smoke of evening fires was curling up to meet the flat shafts of golden sunlight, he had almost convinced himself that she had accepted the scheme and deferred to his superior wisdom. But still he knew that her silence was ominous, and he was unhappy at heart. That dreadful uneasiness persisted until they parted.

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It persisted more or less throughout the summer. When he returned to London in the autumn, Gracie was still living in St. George's Road. Always she was quiet, burdened by her obsession of dislike and rebellion, but still she had not lived up to her first fiery protestations. Compromise, letting things go on—life, Malcolm reflected sadly, was like that. It was misery for him to see her unhappy. It seemed sometimes that she reproached him for a failure to free her from her sorrows; and that was agony. He was almost glad to be in the train again, hurrying toward the oblivion of work.

### II

Work! Malcolm looked forward to that. The end of the summer session had caught him with a series of experiments only half completed. He had seen in the partial results already obtained the promise of something vital, of a contribution, and that his very own, to the sum of human knowledge. Gandy himself had beamed through his rimless spectacles at his notes and said, "Good! Good! Get on with it." But Malcolm had tired after a long winter of hard work and had been glad to get away home. Now, however, the thought of resuming the chase of that elusive gleam of light ahead excited him.

And there was Crompton. He had learned—and

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it surprised Malcolm to realise the fact—he had learned to love another man. Good old Crompton with his cheeriness, his spasmodic brilliance, his solidity, his kindness. It would be good to get back to those teas and significant chats in the afternoons. Women were all very well, but a man wanted sometimes to be quit of them, to be with other men; a man had to escape occasionally from the atmosphere of emotion and intuition into that of reason and disinterested sentiment.

Entering the laboratory that first morning of the new session, Malcolm looked round eagerly. He was greeted cheerfully on all sides, but not by one lusty voice, not by one particular face crowned by ruddy hair. A dim alarm came over him. Suddenly he felt lost and lonely.

“Where’s Crompton?” he asked.

“Hooked it,” said a man by the fire. “Deserted the blooming ship.”

“Deserted? How? Do you mean . . .?”

“Gone into practice with his dad. Knows all about housemaid’s knee and pimples on baby’s little bottom. That sort of thing.”

It was no joke for Malcolm. He had a feeling that the old securities were all slipping away from him. Crompton had been his only link with the ordinary life of men in London. Now he would have nothing at all but work, whether in the hermetical isolation of the laboratory or in the dreariness of his lodgings. It hurt him, too, this un-



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heralded desertion of Crompton's: an unreasonable thought, but he could not away with it. Vague as it was, he could not bring himself to call at the house in Kensington, even to ring up his friend on the telephone.

It was Crompton who came to him, a hearty giant, with a slap on the back that knocked the breath from Malcolm. He came in a smart coupé and emerged as an elegant figure in a bowler hat and a dark, waisted coat. But when he drew from his pocket a packet of biscuits, as of old, Malcolm could have wept for gratitude.

"My dear old son!" cried Crompton, stamping up and down the little room. "Lord, but it's good to see your ugly old mug again!"

"I thought I wasn't going to see you again," said Malcolm.

"Rats, you self-conscious little brute! I'm a busy man now. Look at me! Look at this!" He produced a clinical thermometer in its shining case. "If you run down to the car, you'll see my blinking stethoscope. All complete. Do you know how many I've got on my panel?"

"So you've done it!"

"Yes—right into it up to the neck." Crompton's voice was serious now. "The old dad . . . Well, you know what the trouble was. I had to wade in and save the family face." He laughed a little bitterly. "Did two months in a place at Stoke Newington to brush up my clinical work, then

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started in. It's not so bad, really. But buck up with that tea, laddie. I'm far out my beat, and I've a double pneumonia that's got me nearly bald with fright. Crisis to-night, I should think."

He did not wait long. He was as gay as ever, but Malcolm saw that he was restless, and his heart sank. It would never be the same again. Their ways had parted. Crompton had sold himself out of the community to which he, Malcolm, belonged. There was a shadow of uneasiness over their parting.

"Well, so long, old man," said Crompton. "Sorry I can't wait, but that's the G. P.'s life for you."

He drew on his driving gloves, picked up his hat, and looked thoughtfully into it.

"Oh, it's not so bad, you know. Really, it's not," he asserted. "After all, my dear old son, we all come to it. Love, marriage, money—there you are. You'll do it yourself sooner or later."

Malcolm said nothing. He was staring at the gas fire. Sooner or later . . .

"I notice you don't contradict me quite so furiously as you used to," said Crompton gently. Then he observed a faint spasm cross Malcolm's face. "Don't you worry, old son. It'll all work out in the long run. Come and see me. Often. Every week. We'll have some good old yarns. Phone me when you're coming."

Yes, the telephone. There was no getting directly

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at Crompton now. He was gone beyond intimacy. Malcolm felt that to approach the task of making another friend would be a weariness, with disappointment at the end of it. He would have to go on alone.

The weeks passed, featureless. There came to him, to be sure, two opportunities of making a little money. Casually one day, Gandy passed over to him the task of lecturing each morning to a dull class of dental students. Later, there came from a college in East London an invitation to lecture on biology two nights a week to an audience of earnest suburban seekers after enlightenment. Gandy had made the recommendation to the Board.

Both tasks he accepted with diffidence, but soon he had acquired the trick of exposition, and the duties became part of a routine that was monotonous, save for the recurring excitements of research. And there was money in the work; there were guineas to be put intact into his savings bank account each week. That investment began to swell in a surprising and pleasing way.

But it was a monotonous winter. Even Gracie's letters, he had to admit to himself, did not give him the pleasure they might have given. It was not that Gracie harped on her grievance, but that the tone of them was subdued and perfunctory, as if her obsession had taken the youth out of her. Some of these letters caused Malcolm pain that was acute. Gracie was watching one marriage de-

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velop under her eyes, and pessimistic generalisations on that topic crept occasionally into her communications. That was to Malcolm quite unbearable; his sentimentality was offended. He began to sleep ill and to worry.

It was this pessimism, this sense of a problem outstanding, that took him home at Christmas and led him to the reckless and unforeseen expenditure of five pounds.

### III

The problem came upon him immediately. He returned to find Gracie a changed woman. He could not deny to himself the disconcerting fact that she had lost something of her looks. This pale girl with restless eyes and drooping mouth was not the idol of his dreams. At once he found her difficult to handle, unresponsive. Sometimes she would lash out at him for no apparent cause. Then she would weep. His awkward caresses she seemed to accept only with apathy. She was overcome frequently by fits of obstinate, even hostile, silence. That he could easily diagnose the case as one of nerves did not help Malcolm in the least. He was not her doctor, but her lover, and in his capacity as a man he was woefully innocent and unenterprising.

When he saw her first, pathetic on the platform of the Central Station, she had reached the point

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at which the very thought of her stepmother had become unbearable. At once she wept in his arms and poured out an incoherent story of her miseries. She cried for the luxurious solace of his pity.

"Oh, I can't, Malcolm, I can't! I can't stand it any longer. I'm going to leave them and live with Aunt Agnes."

"But you can't do that!" Malcolm protested. He had not yet grasped the urgency of her case. He reacted according to the respectable standards of his caste. That hurt her.

"I can and I will, if I want to," she flashed at him. Then tears of self-pity overcame her once more. "Nobody cares a bit. Nobody wants to help me!"

"O Gracie!" he pleaded.

The reality of the situation appalled him. It was terribly, melodramatically real. This problem, the sort of thing you would read about with a transient and vicarious thrill, was here, now, in his own life and would remain there, a pain, until it was solved. He was an actor in a near and urgent drama of existence. It was difficult to realise the fact, but he had to realise it. Before him now was the certainty of anxiety, of embarrassment, even of strife. There were decisions to make at once.

"Come along then, Gracie," he said firmly, picking up his suit case. "This simply can't go on. We've got to settle it somehow."

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But behind his decisiveness was the feeling of unreality at finding himself involved so spectacularly in a genuine affair. While his faculties were vividly alive to the presence of Gracie, at the back of his mind there revolved some odd and half-whimsical reflections on the explosive force of human egotism. He heard his companion speak sullenly.

"All the same, I'm going to Aunt Agnes's. I don't care what anybody says."

"Very well," he agreed firmly. "We'll fix that up all right. Perhaps it's the best thing, after all."

He remained master of the situation throughout that afternoon and enjoyed the emotions of masterfulness. Fortunately, Gracie did not demand of him any immediate acts of a decisive character. They lunched in Arlington Street, where no reference whatsoever was made to the establishment in St. George's Road. Apparently the subject was scandalous, and Malcolm listened indifferently to a discussion of the future of Mr. Pottie who, after many years of flirtation with the law, had at last succeeded in satisfying the Final Examiners but had not yet exhibited any symptoms of prosperity.

"He ought to work, Malcolm," Gracie insisted. "He's got the future to think of. I'm sure he'd make his mark if he'd only apply himself."

That, as Malcolm reflected, was a bold thing to say of a man who, approaching middle age, had

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only recently ceased to be a student. It reassured him, however, to hear the unimportant future of Mr. Pottie so earnestly discussed. Perhaps Gracie had exaggerated.

He took her out to the picture house in the afternoon. He would have given much to avoid the topic of her stepmother, but that was the subject she broached immediately they were settled in basket chairs with cups of coffee before them. Not his health, not his life in London, nor her happiness in seeing him again, but just this bitter obsession of jealousy and unhappiness at home. Woman to woman! Malcolm quailed before the sordidness of the affair. Desperation returned, and with it the bravado of the sensitive. He had to convince himself that it was not such a difficult problem as she made it out to be, and he talked, largely. Talking certainly made it seem simpler. If she did leave home and move into Miss Mackenzie's, that would perhaps be the solution.

"You'd better do it," he announced gallantly. "I'd do it at once, Gracie. To-night, in fact." He paused for a moment. "I'll go with you. We'd better see it through properly."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Malcolm," she retorted. "I'm perfectly capable of dealing with that creature myself. You wait. . . ."

That sharp speech did not merely hurt his vanity; it opened his eyes finally to the inevitability of the crisis. To leave home was such a positive, decisive



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gesture. It was the sort of thing that caused scandal. His own mother, Malcolm knew, would warmly disapprove, and he had to admit to himself that his own inherited sense of respectability was shocked. But there was more, so much more; the affair could not stop there. Dimly he feared the potential sequels to this high-handed act of independence. And girls were indeed queer, unreasonable creatures.

When he saw Gracie again, she had done it. He took his Christmas present—a pair of fur-lined gloves—to Arlington Street, and she received it and him as if she had been all her life securely established in that environment. Even Miss Mackenzie resisted the temptation to make a spinster's jest about the daughter of the house.

Gracie was dusting when he discovered her; wearing a trig apron, she seemed part of the immemorial furnishing of the house.

There was no opportunity that day to ask her how she had fared in her ordeal, whether it had been a clandestine move or an overt and melodramatic renunciation of her parents. Miss Mackenzie had cooked a Christmas dinner and would not brook the intervention of tragedy among the high proceedings of the festival. She had the sense of occasion highly developed. It was Christmas Day, and they must make merry with ginger wine, crackers and conversation lozenges. Malcolm found himself recklessly throwing to Mrs. Dinwiddie a

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confection inscribed "To my Sweetheart," and he saw Matthew crown his moon face with a paper hat. Then Miss Mackenzie must produce her bottle of Tawny Invalid Port so that the men, at least, might be allowed the license proper to the occasion. The wine, Malcolm observed, had no marked effect on the stolidity of Matthew.

They dined at four, adopting for the day the programme proper to the Scottish Sabbath, and it was nearly seven before the women retired to the kitchen to face the dreary business of washing up. Postprandial torpor fell upon the household. Matthew slept. Malcolm picked up the *People's Friend* and read it idly, fatalistically. Even the return of the women did not break the calm. Mrs. Dinwiddie resumed at once her study of the serial story in yesterday's *Record*. Miss Mackenzie, conscious of duty done in the faithful observance of a feast, closed her eyes. Gracie took up a bit of needlework. A long silence was broken only by the rustling of the fire and the muffled noises of digestion within Mrs. Dinwiddie.

They had sat thus for nearly half an hour when Miss Mackenzie startled the group.

"Gracie!" she said suddenly. Gracie looked up.

"Yes, Auntie."

"I was thinking, Gracie, it would be nice if you and Malcolm were to slip round to St. George's Road. Just for the look of the thing."

Gracie, bending to bite a thread, did not reply.

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But Miss Mackenzie, firm in the observance of the proprieties, was not to be daunted.

"Really, Gracie, I think you might."

"But, Auntie! I'd honestly rather not go."

"I know, dear. But it would be nice. After all, dear . . . Well, it's Christmas, Gracie, and I'm sure we should all try to forget and forgive."

Peace on earth, good will to all men. The sentiment shone in Miss Mackenzie's decent face, but it was not in the heart of her niece. Gracie was moved only by her love for the dear sentimentalist who had taken her in. She softened.

"All right, Auntie, we'll go," she said. "Will you come with me, Malcolm?"

"Of course, Malcolm must go."

"Oh, rather!" stammered Malcolm, eager to please.

It transpired that Mr. Mackenzie and his new wife were also entertaining a party. The celebration of Christmas is still a suspect novelty in Scotland; there they cling to the sentiment of New Year's Day; but Mr. Mackenzie, enthusiastic in conviviality, had not disdained the opportunities offered by the alien festival.

"Come away in, youse two!" he cried to Malcolm and Gracie. "Come in and have a drink."

There were several guests present. The bearded flautist was there, the dwarf pianist, and men and women Malcolm had never seen before. Obviously they had all been having drinks. The men talked

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loudly and laughed hoarsely; the women cackled. To Malcolm, who saw it through a haze of tobacco smoke, the group seemed sunk in a vicious orgy. He was alarmed.

"No, thanks. I won't have anything," he said.

"A wee whisky," Mr. Mackenzie urged.

"No, thanks. Really."

"All right—stick!" said Mr. Mackenzie sourly. "I never thought ye had the guts of a rabbit, anyway."

And Malcolm heard the loud, sardonic voice of Mrs. Mackenzie greeting Gracie.

"Oh, here's Miss Hoity-Toity! Doesn't mind coming round for five minutes to wish us a merry Christmas. How's your cousin Matthew? Has he tried to cuddle you yet?"

Her friends laughed as at a noble sally. It appeared that all understood the situation and were on the side of the stepmother insulted. Malcolm had the feeling that he and Gracie had stepped into a private meeting of a hostile camp. He wondered if he ought to protest against these insults; he burned with the anger of offended pride. But why attempt to speak? The inebriate bond between the Mackenzies and their guests was invincible. He had to sit still and suffer.

While the ordeal lasted, his mind took in certain facts about the change that had come over the house. Even he could see that it was dirty and untidy. The tablecloth was stained and creased.

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There was thick dust on the mantelpiece. In a corner lay a pile of crumpled newspapers. It had never been a room of beauty, but Mrs. Mackenzie had apparently brought with her certain objects, which, superimposed on the original conception of the furnishing, created hideous effects.

An array of photographs, in particular, made a gruesome gallery on the mantelpiece. A vast and sombre oil painting of a Victorian gentleman in black whiskers gloomed from the wall above the sideboard. In addition to the small piano in walnut that had always graced a corner of the room, they had squeezed in by the window a massive instrument with a black case like a coffin.

But of all the changes in that room, the greatest was in the master and mistress of it. The face of Peter Mackenzie had gone grey, streaked with red; his lips were slack and wet, and his eyes glared glassily. His wife, who had wooed him as a trig widow, had ceased to care for her hair, her skin and her clothes. Malcolm could hardly take his eyes from the heliotrope pallor of her raddled face. He could not take his mind from the idea of a family's degradation through drink.

It was a matter for pity, indeed, but Malcolm's immediate reactions were those of fear and horror and disgust. For once in a while he took the initiative and rose after they had been but ten minutes in the house.

"I think we ought to be going, Gracie," he said.

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"Sit down on your doup and have a drink!" roared Mr. Mackenzie, outraged by this defiance of the convivial virtues.

"Oh, don't let us keep you," shrilled his wife, ironical. "Write and tell us when you are coming round again."

They left the room, and nobody rose to show them out. In the lobby, Gracie burst into tears.

### IV

He ignored that feminine symptom. Beside his realisation of horror it was trivial. All his tenderness was burned up in the white flame of anger. They had reached the street before he could find words to express himself.

"It's . . . it's damnable!" he cried—almost as if he were accusing her. "Utterly damnable! Is that the sort of thing you've had to stand! My God!"

Still she wept and said nothing. They were walking fast towards Charing Cross.

"It can't go on like this; that's flat," he continued indignantly. "Even in Arlington Street, you're next door to it. It's utterly impossible."

They turned into Woodlands Road. He felt her hand slip, pleading for comfort, into his. She was still sobbing.

"There's only one thing for it. We're jolly well going to get married—quick!"

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Her fingers tightened round his and communicated a tremor to his arm.

"Do you hear me, Gracie? We're going to get married."

They were in Arlington Street, and Arlington Street was dark and quiet. Suddenly Gracie stopped and swung herself round into his arms. He saw her wet eyes glisten in the lamplight, saw that now she surrendered her will and destiny utterly to him.

"O Malcolm, Malcolm! Yes, marry me, please! I want you. I want to be yours, only yours. Take me away, please."

She wanted him! It was miraculous, a glorious drunkenness. He felt strong and confident. It was to be his magnificent privilege to save her from misery and take her away. There was nothing in the world more splendid than the chance of taking care of her, this tired little girl with the starry eyes. He remembered how lonely he had been in London, and he thought how happy they would be together. The defiance of convention that their marriage must imply seemed to make the prospect all the more wonderful.

"Yes, sweetheart, I'll take you away!" he cried, gathering her close to him till his lips were crushed against her cheek.

"Soon, darling, soon! Please!"

"Yes, soon, soon. I'll see at once. . . . We must! Oh, it will be wonderful!"



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"Malcolm darling! Dear Malcolm!"

She was fondling his ear with soft, cold fingers. He wanted to stay there, out on the pavement, held in her arms. A bareheaded girl came out from a house opposite to post a letter. Hastily they broke apart.

"Don't come in, Malcolm," she whispered. "I couldn't bear it. And don't tell anybody just now. But you'll remember, dear—soon."

"Soon, sweetheart! It's all right now. All right now. . . ."

She disappeared into the close. On his way to the Central Station in the tram, Malcolm felt very kindly disposed to the people about him. Seen from the train, a red moon above the Renfrewshire hills, like a lantern hung over the frosty fields of the alluvial plain, was the loveliest thing he had ever beheld in his life.

### v

She had asked him not to tell anyone of their pact, and it was an unnecessary warning. Malcolm knew too well the solemnity with which marriage in its social and economic aspects was regarded by his relations and hers. It was an affair which the families must approach with portentous gravity. They must, according to their code, deal with the project in conference, satisfy themselves on the head of finance, and insist on

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the observance of the religious proprieties. Mr. and Mrs. Tweedie would no doubt see fit to make a formal pilgrimage to St. George's Road; Mr. Mackenzie, drunk or sober, would demand the economic guarantees that a good parent must have. There would be warnings against haste, platitudinous pleas for a long engagement; there would be months, perhaps years, of dreary archness and giggling and obvious arrangements to leave the young people together.

And all that was impossible, and Malcolm knew that he could never convince his elders that his sudden marriage was anything but a shady business. Were he to announce his decision, there could be nothing but disapproval, perhaps tears and melodrama, to darken the wedding day. His mother—he knew that she was bound to protest violently, and he could not face the sordidness of a conflict in the house. It must remain his and Gracie's dear secret.

When he reached home that night, however, and saw his mother's delight and his father's quiet satisfaction in his return, a wave of remorseful sentiment came over him. Might he not have misjudged the vast capacity for kindness and self-sacrifice of these two old people who loved him? While he sat before the kitchen fire, taking off his shoes, his mother bustled about, laying supper for him. Inveterately thoughtful in the manner of mothers, she had kept hot for him in the oven a

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portion of the black pudding that had graced the family tea. His father had laid aside his paper and was asking kindly after Gracie. And Malcolm was touched. There came over him in that moment a nearly irresistible desire to blurt it out, to throw himself on their kindness. He felt his heart beating strongly.

"Gracie and I . . ." he did say, blushing. "I suppose you know we're practically engaged?"

"I dare say ye are, son," said his mother, lightly. "You've been running about together long enough, the two of you. But come, Malcolm, your supper's ready."

His heart leaped. Was it to be easy after all? Did they already assume the certainty of his marriage to Gracie? When, however, he was seated at the table, his father spoke gravely.

"It's a serious thing, marriage," said Mr. Tweedie. "It's not juist what all you young folk mebbe think. A serious business, I'm tellin' ye. Living's dear, now—rent, taxes, food—they've a' gaun up terrible."

"Tuts, Tam!" Mrs Tweedie broke in impatiently. "The boy's no' going to get married the morn. Nor for a good long time yet, I hope."

"That's so, Nance, but I wis juist pointing out . . ."

"Well, we can wait till the time comes. I don't like to hear ye talking as if it was next week."

No, it was impossible. Malcolm knew that he

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could not face that mass of established opposition. It hurt him to hurt—but there was Gracie, whom he had promised to save from unhappiness. He began to feel for the first time that his father and mother were strangers, outside his life, incapable of understanding his own developing individuality.

But to get married and take Gracie away—that was the burning necessity of the moment. He could not make any elaborate plans, could do nothing but approach the nearest obstacle, tackle it, and go on to the next. A recklessness came over him. There were seventy pounds in his Savings Bank account, and he had made up his mind to get married. He could get married and damn the expense in sentiment and cash.

At the Garth Library they let him see Whitaker's Almanack, and he found that on pages 419-424 the marriage laws of the country were fully set forth. He took the volume to the table by the window, and sat down with pencil and paper to abstract the essence of its counsel. At once he was held up, appalled, by the word "banns." Blindly he read on: "The Marriage Act 26 Geo. II c. 33, prescribes audible publication according to the rubric." It was all very confusing and depressing. He turned the pages rapidly to discover that Marriages in Scotland occupied a separate section. He found what he wanted: "Irregular Marriages" . . . unpleasant phrase! . . . "Disregarded the

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decrees of the Council of Trent; Scotland following the ancient Canon law."

It was very irritating. True, the legal position was set forth lucidly enough, but young Malcolm, a child in affairs, wanted to know how these requirements were practically observed. "Exchange of consent." He could follow the idea, but he could not visualise the ceremony. "The parties appear before the Sheriff. . ." Yes, but, how did one get access to the Sheriff? Pondering these things sadly, with his head in his hands, his young figure diminished to nonentity by contrast with the high, dark cases of the dim library, he bethought himself in desperation of Mr. Pottie.

He did not pause to consider the quality of Mr. Pottie as a confidant. It was enough that he knew a lawyer who could put these things through quickly. They met by appointment next day in a cellar that the Glasgow genius for temperance catering had converted into a cosy and discreet tea-room. Mr. Pottie was highly diverted by Malcolm's story.

"But, my dear Tweedie, it's really *awfully* funny!" he cried. "Do you really mean to say you're going to marry little Gracie just like that? Really now? . . . Well, I'm damned if that's not *awfully* funny!"

He cachinnated over the idea for some time, while Malcolm sat mute and felt foolish. Occa-

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sionally Mr. Pottie stopped giggling to insist on the humour of the proposition.

"But I say, Tweedie, it's really *awfully* funny. Dear old Miss Mackenzie. . . Oh, I say, it's *awfully* funny!"

Malcolm soon discovered to his great relief that Mr. Pottie's sense of humour was tickled by the audacity of the project and not by its irregularity. When he had survived the first hilarious shock, Mr. Pottie was ready to outline, almost enthusiastically, the procedure to be observed. He anticipated that the ceremony would be awfully funny, and declared that he would not miss it for worlds. And he promised to keep the secret. That was part of the joke that so mysteriously amused him.

"My dear Tweedie, we'll have you married within a week. Say next Tuesday. It's the easiest thing in the world. Just get hold of another witness—somebody who knows you both. *Really*. . . Oh, say—you and little Gracie!"

He gave himself over to mirth once more.

They were married. Girl and boy stood side by side before a desk in a shabby chamber of a lawyer's office in St. Vincent Street. They were, in that dull atmosphere, like innocent wanderers from a better and brighter world under trial according to a code they did not understand. Behind the desk sat a queer, dusty old man with a face and voice like those of a decayed tragedian. Mr. Pottie and his

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fellow witness were somewhere in the room near the door. The old man put to Malcolm and Gracie a series of questions, and they answered them. But Malcolm's mind, at least, was not in the drama of the ceremony. His eyes wandered over a range of black boxes portentously labelled—"John Duthie's Trust," "Hutchinson Mortification," and the rest. He glanced down once at the bowed head of Gracie and saw the grave profile of her cheek and, in her little hands, the pathetic bunch of violets he had bought her. She trusted him. An arrow of exquisite pain shot to his heart.

"That's all, then," he heard the old man say. "I wish you good morning—and all happiness to you madam."

A cab was at the door, and they were driven to the County Buildings in charge of Mr. Pottie. They moved quickly through noisy corridors to a door numbered 7, and waited outside while Mr. Pottie passed within. He came out immediately with a clerk, who spoke confidentially.

"He'll be just a minute. He's finishing off a bunch of Small Debts."

They waited again until the last of a procession of drab women issued from the room. With a jerk of the head, the clerk invited them to enter. They saw a man in wig and gown on a dais before them. He was writing, and he did not look up while the clerk gabbled an intimation. Then he raised his head suddenly and spoke. There were



questions, sharp and shrewd. Then the Sheriff spoke his final word:

“Decree.”

His eyes focussed on Gracie, and he smiled faintly. “I hope you will be happy,” said the Sheriff and went on with his writing.

Mr. Pottie left them at the Central Station.

“I say, you two, this is awfully funny, you know. Really. . . .And I know you’ll be *frightfully* happy.”

Then they were alone together, man and wife. They had little to say. They had to retrieve their luggage from the cloakroom and find seats in the afternoon train. Gracie left it all to him, and only smiled into his eyes when she could catch his nervous glance. He knew by these smiles how completely she had surrendered to him, how onerous was the trust he had accepted. He kissed her once in the empty carriage they found and murmured, “Darling.” Like a little child she obeyed demurely his instruction to sit there and wait for him, while he kept watch from the platform on the gate. He could not believe that they were safe.

But no friend came to see them off or hold them back. The bell rang and the great train moved on the stroke of time. They had, irrevocably, started out on their journey together.

## CHAPTER IX

### I

THEIR honeymoon lasted five days—five short days grudged to them by fate out of the long, drab cycle of days that go to make up man's life. They were inexperienced and gullible, and sharp people took advantage of them. They had behind them all the time the shadow of their crime against Scots respectability. They had before them all the problems of marriage and the business of settling down. They lacked money. Yet, since they were so young, they were very happy.

Malcolm moved in a dream through those five stolen days. It was as if life had suddenly been simplified. He was moved by unaccustomed emotions of kindness and generosity toward all living things. The air was clear about him; a tangle of doubts and inhibitions had been resolved. Care fell from him, and a new and delicious security in the companionship of Gracie fortified him. Now he could appreciate many things he would have disregarded before, for passion had awakened the sense of beauty within him. The world was a fine place for him in those five days; and oh, how much finer,

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how unutterably exquisite, was the little world which he and his Gracie shared through the medium of a language only they could understand, a communion of exalted and ineffable sweetness!

He lived vividly throughout the honeymoon. And there were moments in it that were magical. On their very first night together, in a clattering hotel in Southampton Row, he had a glimpse of Gracie that tore his heart with its beauty. An elaborate delicacy had taken him along to the bath while she undressed, and he returned, trembling, to behold what was to his starved eyes a miracle.

There she stood before the mirror in a dressing gown of pale blue. Her hair was down on her shoulders, and she turned her head to give him a shy, downcast look that was ravishing. His emotion transcended passion. He seemed to see then the spirit of girlhood, shy, lovely, trustful, pure. Gently he took her into his arms and murmured into her hair, as one who reverently accepts a trust. This sweet, beloved creature was his, to be cherished, to be defended. The pressure of her soft, white arms on his shoulders was ravishing. It was all beyond words, beyond imagination, the purity and loveliness of his momentary vision. She was something that should not be touched and defiled, a virgin perfect in beauty on her bridal night. Malcolm was never to forget that moment of perfection.

Indeed, he lived in its reflected radiance for days thereafter. It was specially wonderful when he

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wakened in the morning to find, surprising the habit of bachelor years, that a girl was sleeping at his side. Invariably he raised his head to delight in the picture of her tumbled and yet gracious hair on the pillow, the calm of her sleeping face, the frivolous fluff of lace on her smooth shoulders. Then he would hold himself rigid, lest he should disturb her. It gave him a thrill of protectiveness that was wonderful. So for an hour he would lie rejoicing in marriage. He used to formulate and defend in his mind optimistic views of that institution.

They went to Brighton, and Heaven alone knows why. It was obvious, perhaps, since their ultimate destination was London and Malcolm had to be at work on the Monday morning. Possibly their patronage was another triumph of organised publicity. Actually it mattered little where they were, so long as they were together. Gracie, at least, was content to be with Malcolm, her saviour. He had in his strange mind a dormant curiosity regarding the great town by the sea.

They had booked no rooms. A morning train from Victoria disgorged on to the Brighton platform two vague and pathetic wanderers. Porters and cab drivers hailed them in vain. They had not yet learned the slick ways of the metropolitan world, and the instinct of economy combined with shyness to send them out on their own resources. Each carrying a suit case, they emerged into Queen's Road and looked about them. It seemed proper to

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go straight ahead. They went straight ahead, turned down North Street, and, wondering that a seaside town should be so busy, on the eastern side of the Steine encountered the soiled brass plate of the Pasadena Boarding Establishment.

They rang the bell diffidently. It was some time before a bedraggled girl answered the summons. She thought there was room. She would get the missus. The missus appeared, a mature woman with bright yellow hair. Shortly they were alone together again in a bleak room looking across to the blatant curves of the Pavilion. They had upon them the uneasiness of new arrivals. There was no water in the jugs on the frail stand, and they debated whether or not they should ring. Gracie decided that they should not; she had a notion that there were extra charges for such services. And lunch was not till one.

"I might as well unpack," said Gracie.

It delighted Malcolm to watch her at that task. He loved to have her in charge of his clothes. There was pleasure for him in seeing the neatness of her ways with garments and observing the infallible knack of women in affairs of the kind. Happy in the atmosphere of domesticity, he sat by the window and smoked. With a shirt of his in her hands, as if she had handled his belongings for years, Gracie came across and stood beside him. He put his arm about her waist.

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"It's bigger than Rothesay," she observed thoughtfully, staring out at the Brighton traffic.

"Yes, dear," he replied and added, with a touch of prophecy that faintly surprised himself, "and London's bigger than Glasgow."

But they were not there to ponder the future nor even to have much concern with the sterner actualities of the present. The Pasadena Boarding Establishment was a mean, starved place, dead and dull in the winter months. The food was poor and slovenly served in a cold dining room, and Gracie, with the keen eyes of the Scots housewife, saw that the house was not clean.

For the time, however, such facts were of no account. In the shining immediacy of their passion they did not tread the base and common earth. There were only two people in their world. Three spinsters, their fellow guests in that deplorable hostel, sought to ingratiate themselves in vain. They were invited to play whist and somewhat coldly refused, but the resultant frigidity only intensified the delicious sense of isolation that Malcolm and Gracie so rapturously enjoyed.

They were out all day. Along the noble stretch of the King's Road and Hove Lawns they walked again and again, talking of that home which was to be theirs in London. A cosy home, it was to be. Gracie was all for a house on one floor; it saved work, and stairs were just a heartbreak. You couldn't keep a servant where there were stairs.

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. . . That was a magnificent and inexhaustible topic of conversation. Then they would take to debating which of the great hotels on the Brighton front would have their patronage when they were rich. They rejected the Metropole and favoured the Bedford, which looked so solid and, in Gracie's eyes, so *good*. She particularly admired the curtains, and a glimpse of a vacuum cleaner in the hall impressed her deeply and favourably. The Old Ship, of course, also looked good, but Gracie felt that there was a tavern flavour about the name. And Gracie was sensitive on the subject of liquor. Anyhow, to talk about these things was just as good as being rich.

A garrulous tout lured them into a *char-à-banc* that took them to the Dyke in the teeth of a north wind of extreme bitterness. They travelled with a silent, submissive family of Japs, who bought large quantities of picture postcards and took many snapshots on the heights. Malcolm and Gracie were well satisfied with the outing; it was like discharging an obligation to Brighton, though they saw nothing from the Dyke, preferring to sit before a fire in the hotel and drink hot coffee.

Another day they visited the Aquarium and followed an attendant through its dank and depressing grottoes. The attendant lectured, and Gracie stood before him, receptive, with her lips parted. Somehow it pleased Malcolm to behold her innocence. The few other women he had encountered had so openly despised facts. He loved her for that sim-



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plicity, for that eagerness of young life in her. The attendant, he knew very well, was weak in biological knowledge, and his specimens—a lethargic alligator and a sad guillemot—were but melancholy representatives of the glory of nature. But Gracie listened open-mouthed and moved with the attendant when, each discourse finished, he invited his audience to pass on with a cryptic “’Swayp.” Gracie thought it was all very interesting indeed, and said so to Malcolm.

“Yes, dear,” he tenderly agreed.

Their last day in Brighton was for them, who were so simple, a day crowned with glory. In the forenoon Gracie had her fill of the shops and led a docile Malcolm from window to window, pointing out to him this loveliness, that desirable thing. He followed her happily. This, he felt, was a rich experience. The cosy joys of uxoriousness enveloped him. He found it very wonderful, almost an uplifting experience, that he could now stand with Gracie before a window devoted to the display of ladies’ underwear and make facetious remarks about the inadequacy of the garments, while she blushed and, secretly delighted, pretended to be shocked. That, indeed, was living richly. Once, when she went in to buy a piece of ribbon, he slipped across the street to a chemist’s and bargained for a bottle of perfume. The price of perfume astonished him. Twelve and six for a tiny bottle!

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"Of course, if you want inferior stuff . . ." said the chemist with pity.

"Oh, no. This will do nicely," replied Malcolm hastily. After all, it was for Gracie, the first present of their married life.

She was ravished.

"O Malcolm! You dear darling!" cried the girl. Then the wife appeared: "How much did it cost?"

"Never you mind!" he said.

"But Malcolm—good scent's so dear. And Coty, too. Malcolm, how much?"

"Well, if you want to know—" he began playfully.

He wanted to tell her. He wanted her to know that in his eyes nothing was too good for her. He told her.

"Malcolm! Twelve and six! You're a silly boy, and you're not to do it again. Now promise."

And he knew that her girl's heart was bursting with pride and joy in his kindness and dash. It was a wonderful morning.

Moiseiwitsch was to play in Hove Town Hall in the afternoon and though a golden winter sun was glowing they joined the throng of pig-tailed school-girls and grave Jews outside the doors of that dull red building. It was cold within, and there was about the audience a disconcerting air of the chill gentility that comes on those who do a polite duty by culture. Malcolm felt that it was all a little bit ridiculous, this solemn sitting in congregation while

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a slim, aloof young man played the pianoforte. Music was not within the scope of his sympathy, and even Chopin was to him a weariness of the flesh. But he could always watch Gracie, rapt, receptive, delighted like a child with something outside her narrow experience.

"Oh, it was wonderful!" she cried sincerely when they came out into the frosty dusk.

"You bet!" he answered. "Fine!"

Secretly, he was chuckling over a dramatic anticipation. An idea, rapturous and gigantic, had occurred to him while they sat in the Town Hall. He hurried her down to the front.

"Where are we going?" she asked innocently. Her sense of direction was not highly developed.

"You wait," he cautioned her. "We're not going back to that rotten boarding house, anyhow."

"Malcolm! You're not going to spend more money."

"You keep quiet. This is my show. Dash it, Gracie, it's our last night."

"Well, we ought to be saving now."

But she surrendered herself to him. He was irresistible in his gallant intention. Gracie found herself following him into a pink-lit restaurant, into an atmosphere thick with the odour of cooking fish. It was not a temple of gastronomy. The furnishings were shabby, the tablecloths soiled. There was but one waiter, a sallow boy, and his false shirt front was cracked and dirty. But Gracie had never been

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in a place like it before. Tacitly and unwillingly she paid tribute to Malcolm's grandiose conception. She loved to hear him issue a command to the waiter.

"The menu, please."

They dined. A stupendous meal. Gracie had then her first encounter with *hors d'œuvres*—"funny wee things," she described the morsels—and after a timid start, settled down to real enjoyment of these piquant and treacherous trifles. They had sole.

"Waiter—the wine list." It was Malcolm's culminating gesture.

"Malcolm!" she protested.

"All right, old girl, you leave this to me."

Tarragona Wine he chose, one and threepence the half bottle. It looked red and dangerous and lovely. Gracie screwed up her face over the first mouthful and would have no more, but Malcolm was in the mood for gallantry and finished the bottle. He became extremely talkative and affectionate. He spoke very recklessly of the future and of his own amazing prospects as a scientist. With a flourish and in gross excess he tipped the waiter and suffered himself to be helped into his coat. Halfway home he found that he had left his stick behind. That seemed to him extremely funny.

But they had to pack up that night. It was the end. To-morrow to London and work and a dubious future and a reckoning with the people at home. While Gracie bent over the suit cases, Mal-

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colm sat disconsolate on the bed. The little room in which they had been so happy now seemed to him bleak and cheerless. The aftermath of Tarragona Wine, waning in strength, left him with a mind that inclined to brood, as if at the back of it were some dominating worry that the happiness of these five days had allowed him temporarily to forget. He took to counting his resources.

Gracie's voice broke into his meditation.

"Malcolm," she began casually. "How much has our holiday cost us?"

He looked up to see that she had in her hand his Savings Bank book.

"Oh, I don't know," he said carelessly. "We've spent it."

"Yes, but about how much?"

"About twenty-five pounds, I should think."

"What!"

The exclamation was almost a scream, and her uncontrolled horror exasperated him. He was vaguely offended by the pained and reproachful look on her face. He spoke sharply.

"It's not necessary to shout. What could you expect? There were our fares from Glasgow, remember, and the hotel bill here. It's a bit late to start grumbling."

She did not reply. Her face fell again to the cases, and in such a way that he knew he had hurt her. It was to conceal her tears. He began to feel very miserable. She had been silly, almost hysterical; he

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was satisfied about that; but it was a pity that their honeymoon should end like this. He felt guilty, and it came into his mind that the reaction from alcoholic exhilaration is apt to be sordid.

They went to bed in silence. There in the darkness they lay back to back. If only he could screw himself up to ask her forgiveness!

"Malcolm . . ." he heard her whisper mournfully.

"Yes."

"Malcolm, I'm sorry I spoke like that. I was just frightened."

She blamed herself! Fiercely he pulled her round into his arms. There she lay and sobbed, and he so loved the pitiful sweetness of her that he wept with her. They were both very young and far from home.

"Malcolm, dear," she whispered, "Malcolm, will you let me keep the bank book? I want to keep it safe. Malcolm, please." Her lips were at his ear. The appeal was of exquisite intimacy, "We might have a wee baby, Malcolm, some day and . . ."

He closed her mouth with kisses. She could safely have asked him for his very life.

## II

Their approach to the business of house hunting in London was lamentably optimistic. Malcolm's experience in lodgings had taught him nothing of

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the tangled economics of domesticity in the metropolis. Gracie went out gaily on the quest with the simple faith that the standards of Glasgow were universally applicable. About forty-five pounds a year for a three-roomed flat—that was her idea; but since they must take furnished apartments, she was prepared to go to five pounds a month.

An agent's clerk smiled contemptuously on their frightened simplicity. He had furnished flats at six guineas a week; he admitted that there were some at five, even a few miserable hovels at four. While they whispered timidly, he ostentatiously yawned. Again Malcolm begged, as for a favour, for a mention of something more moderate.

"What is your figure?" The agent's clerk was rude, and when Malcolm mumbled of something about two guineas, he sneered. "It's not going to be much of a flat, is it? Wait a minute."

He disappeared and came back with a book.

"There's an address in Pimlico, if that's the sort of thing you want. Here you are—ninety-seven-B Charlwood Street. Mrs. Bowsted. Two and half. That's all we can do."

"Do we just go down . . . ?" began Malcolm.

"Yes, you just go down. That's the usual idea. *Good morning.*"

Mrs. Bowsted was formidable in another way; she was tall and severe and silent. She showed them round with the air of one who wishes to hurry away to another engagement. She had the pulsating con-



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tralto of a queen of tragedy, and she looked like one, slightly decayed.

"The dining room."

Dutifully they stood and looked about them at the dull red walls, the worn carpet, the cold gas fire, and at a stuffed pike in a dusty case above the door. Mrs. Bowsted allowed them a minute of sheepish investigation, then boomed again.

"The bedroom."

It was a more cheerful chamber, though the window gave on a blank wall about ten feet away. And there was another grey gas fire.

"The kitchen," said Mrs. Bowsted.

The kitchen was, also, apparently the bathroom. Between the gas stove near the door and the tiny window stretched the bath, of which the bottom was littered with rubbish.

"Where's the jawbox?" asked Gracie timidly.

"I beg your pardon."

"The jawbox—the sink?"

"We use this," said Mrs. Bowsted grandly.

This was a washstand basin set underneath the window. Mrs. Bowsted went on.

"The geyser is over the bath. Shilling-in-the-slot gas meter there beside the stove. Same sort of meter for electricity above the bedroom door. There are two keys. You will, of course, bring your own linen. The lavatory is on the first floor—you share that with other tenants. If you decide to take the flat, please inform the agents."

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The interview was at an end. In the street again, the Tweedies looked up at the classical Pimlico frontage which so elaborately camouflaged a dark and sordid interior.

"Well?" asked Malcolm tentatively.

"It's simply filthily dirty!" hissed Gracie. "A bath in the kitchen! Just fancy! And we've got to buy linen! O Malcolm . . ."

"But what can we do?" he asked bleakly as they walked toward Victoria.

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure," she replied dolefully. "It's terribly difficult."

They took the flat. London defeated them, and they had not the heart to fight its impassive complexity. There was a month's rent to pay in advance. And there was that linen to buy.

"Gosh!" said Malcolm, "but it's going to be a near thing."

They did not realise what they had undertaken. Charlwood Street taught them its lesson slowly but with deadly thoroughness. It was all they had, all they could afford, but never did they learn to look upon it as home. They felt so long as they were there that the place was mean and unfriendly, even sinister, as if there was a curse upon it.

The bitter truth came upon them gradually in a hundred subtle ways. Those meters, for instance. It seemed that they battened on shillings. It was heartbreaking to sit at night then, suddenly, to be plunged into darkness. The gas fire, at least, gave

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signs of its waning powers, but the light withdrew itself with a cynical click. Then a fumbling in the dark with the stepladder and a choking encounter with the dust of the bedroom, while Malcolm balanced on the top step and struggled with a reluctant piece of mechanism. It meant keeping a collection of shillings, shillings that were very precious to them. Gracie could never be convinced that the Gas Light and Coke Company dealt with them fairly.

Soon she gave up any attempt to cook on the rusty stove. They lived poorly on cheap cooked food that she bought in the street markets of Pimlico. In any event, Mrs. Bowsted had politely swindled them. The crockery consisted of a tiny collection of meagre, cracked pieces. There were a kettle, a frying pan, and a stewpan with a hole in the bottom of it. So she bought cooked food and nearly broke her heart over her enforced failure as a housewife. And the English shopkeepers did not understand her. They had never heard of a gigot of lamb or smoked ham. It was all legs of mutton and long-back rashers and things nobody had ever heard of.

It was not as if they could go out at nights and forget Charlwood Street. They could walk indeed, but the mean streets of Pimlico and a dull stretch of the Embankment have limited attractions. The cruel east winds of late winter were beginning to blow, and it was not good to be out. So they sat

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over the mean gas fire, reading and watching for the symptoms of a failure of pressure. There were but two tolerable chairs in the room, and they had to use them turn about, for the springs of one were broken. Life seemed to hang fire then. An occasional cab whirred along the street, but it was very silent otherwise. The gas fire hissed. From the basement below came continually the hacking, metallic cough of a child with chronic bronchitis. They could only read, then talk desultorily, and all the time the stuffed pike stared glassily from his case above the door.

"I could *smash* that thing!" Gracie used to cry when the monotony of the winter evenings got on her nerves.

It was a pleasure to get to bed, though the room was dirty. It was positively exciting to have a bath, though neither of them survived a feeling of aversion from bathing in that dark and smelling kitchen. Sometimes a rat ran across the torn waxcloth while the geyser was running.

Gracie slept well, by the mercy of providence, but insomnia came to Malcolm as the weeks passed. He was ashamed that he must ask her to live in rooms so mean. If only he could make more money and take her away to cleanliness and sunlight! But they had hardly enough to keep them in Charlwood Street. Actually not enough: and he had to lie awake and worry and plan and seek to balance his miserable accounts. Sometimes self-pity came upon

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him, and he felt that their young lives were being darkened. His head ached, and he would grow desperate while Big Ben boomed the small hours over the city. Always from below came the hacking cough of the sick child.

### III

Actually it weighed most heavily on Gracie, this stagnation of life in Pimlico. Malcolm never knew what that house was like through the cheerless hours of the grey February days. He saw it only when lighted fires and lamps gave to the barren rooms at least a semblance of cosiness. But the long forenoons and afternoons were hers to bear. She could not even deceive herself into believing that a pretence at housework was worth while in that hopeless flat. It came to be that she wept for an hour before the gas fire when the great front door banged behind her husband.

He did not observe the traces of unhappiness in her. He had ceased somehow to be a sensitive observer of such things, and her face was always bright with happiness and relief when he returned from his mysterious day in the outer world. He did not see her in the state of listless misery that came over her when he was out at nights, lecturing to seekers after knowledge in the East End.

She did not complain. It was her womanly faith that he, the breadwinner, must be too tired after

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the day's work to listen to a tale of woe from her. She was ever ready, in response to his casual questions, with bright tales of what she had seen in London that day.

She did, to be sure, see much of London in these dark weeks. She was driven by the sordidness of their rooms to go out and seek diversion in the streets. For a week or two the great shops of the West End delighted her; then gradually their gorgeous windows lost the power to attract. To know that she could buy nothing from them set up in her mind a dull ache of resentment. And looking at the shops was a tiring occupation. The hard pavements of London made her muscles ache, and she was always footsore. Often she found her way into the church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields and sat there, wistful and lonely, waiting for the hours of the long day to pass. It was not as if she could afford to waste time in the London manner over pleasant lunches. A cup of tea and a sausage roll in the A.B.C. shops had to suffice.

Her expeditions round the shops came to an abrupt end. London put a great fear upon her. At first, the symptoms that ultimately terrified her she hardly noticed. Then she wondered if she was not absurdly self-conscious. Then she knew that a sensitive woman alone in the West End has reason to be afraid. Men followed her, leering. There were ancient satyrs who dogged her along Piccadilly, and she knew by infallible instinct that their

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rheumy eyes were on her legs. In Wardour Street once, a sallow and obese young man whispered a foul sentence in her ear. There was an effeminate youth in waisted coat and patent leather shoes who sat down beside her in the bus at Lupus Street, followed her off at Trafalgar Square, tracked her through Leicester Square and up Regent Street. It was like being haunted. For one fatal moment she paused to look in at a window of Liberty's; when she turned, the youth stood smiling, hat in hand, ogling her with the complaisant look of a conqueror. "Good afternoon," he said brightly. She ran from him across the busy street under the noses of buses.

It was more than a fear these prowling men put into her. She was pained and horrified by ugliness; she recoiled from the unclean. She felt she could not face the West End alone. So it came about that her days were spent drearily in the museums and galleries. Mournfully she walked the corridors of South Kensington and dawdled before the pictures in the Tate. She sat for hours in the Abbey. Once, unaccountably, she burst into tears beside the Unknown Warrior's grave. Bentley's great Cathedral awed her simple soul, and there she sometimes studied tracts designed to bring the unbeliever into the Roman fold. She actually penetrated the grim mysteries of the Geological Museum in Jermyn Street. But from all these treasure houses of information and faith she took away nothing. Her



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vitality was too low. She was merely passing time in a state of numb misery.

And so, perhaps to weep by the fire, back to Charlwood Street in the dusk, passing from the brightness of Westminster or Belgravia into the gloom that has settled permanently on the marshes of Pimlico. It seemed an age before Malcolm came home.

They had no friends. Malcolm refrained from seeking out Crompton again. He felt that through his marriage he had passed beyond that sympathy. Gracie and Crompton's sister—he could not bear to think of that possible meeting. There was also at the back of his mind a lurking fear that Crompton would preach to him and perhaps put ideas into Gracie's head. That was unthinkable. His work with Gandy was becoming exciting. Their experiments seemed to be leading surely to something big. There was nothing more securely established in his mind than a determination to stay with Gandy and share in the glory of discovery.

He did not see that Gracie was unhappy. When he brought home to her one night an invitation from Gandy himself he felt that she was enjoying unique social opportunities. They were to dine with Gandy in Hampstead. The prospect filled him with pride. It hurt him when she frowned at his announcement.

"But I've nothing to wear," she began.

"Oh, dash it, Gracie!" he retorted irritably.

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"Don't talk like that. It's frightfully important to me, don't you see? In fact"—he assumed an air of determination—"you've got to go, and that's all about it."

They went. Malcolm put on his dinner jacket and congratulated himself on being able to cut a figure appropriate to the grandeurs of Hampstead. He thought Gracie's dress was charming, and he laughed when she complained of having to wear a coat when a cloak was indicated. He did not know the canker of fear and self-consciousness that was eating at her simple heart. He did not know that she was thinking hard of a Mrs. Gandy and her putative daughters.

They came out of the deep tube shaft into the breezes of Hampstead and found the house in a dark grove off Frognal. It dashed Malcolm considerably to discover that his host still wore the tweeds of the working day, and he saw Gracie quail before Mrs. Gandy, a tall and handsome woman with a distant manner. He was affected, too, by the warm comfort of the house, by its soft lights, its rich hangings, its incredibly luxurious chairs, and by the glittering splendour of the table. But a glass of sherry revived him. He began to feel that it was very fine to be in this atmosphere of ease and elegance. If only Gracie would come out of her frightened silence and contribute something more to the conversation than polite platitudes in a flat Glasgow voice! Inspired by claret, he found

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himself extremely critical of Gracie. It seemed so important that she should learn to move with ease in the sort of circle to which they might, with all modesty, legitimately aspire.

But Gracie did not live up to the occasion. Gracie was beaten and humiliated by the austere personality of Mrs. Gandy. "Yes," and "No," she answered dully when spoken to, and when she forgot herself so far as to hazard a fragment of information or a statement of opinion, she was met by a satirical, incredulous "Really!" from her hostess. That fatuous adverb got on her nerves. It was very plain to Gracie from the first that Mrs. Gandy had prepared to crush her. She had seen those hard eyes run up and down her simple dress. She knew that Mrs. Gandy knew that it had been made by her own hands, and she knew that Mrs. Gandy sneered. She was glad when it was all over.

They went home down the Finchley Road on a No. 2 bus, and Gracie wept silently. Malcolm, at her side, was silent too. She knew that he was angry, contemptuous, scornful of her social failure. He spoke only once on the long journey home.

"Oh, for God's sake, stop crying!" he said irritably.

It seemed to Gracie that life was done and all hope of happiness departed from it. That Malcolm could speak to her like that, brutally! He had ceased to love her, and without his love she could not live. So she continued to weep. He did not

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speak again till they were back in the dining room in Charlwood Street, so bare and depressing after the dignified splendours of the house on Frognal.

"Oh, do stop crying!" he pleaded. "It's bad enough without that."

"Bad enough!" she challenged him. Now she was fit to dry her tears and meet anger with anger.

"What do you mean, Malcolm?"

"I mean what I say. You sat there like a dummy and spoiled the whole evening."

"Spoiled the whole evening! I like that! If your fancy friends had any manners it might be worth while talking to them. But that beast of a woman with her 'Really! Really!' You would think she was somebody instead of a vulgar snob. I hope I never see her again."

"You will see her again if I want you to."

"I won't."

"And I say you will. It matters a good deal to me, our meeting these people." He dropped his voice to an ignoble sneer. "Of course, if you want to stay in Charlwood Street all your life . . ."

"I suppose I'll have to, if you're not going to make any attempt to take me out of it."

"I'm going to stay where I am just now, that's flat. I've got my work to do, and it means a good deal more to me than perhaps you realise. Of course, you can go back to your father if I'm not good enough."

Whereat she wept again. It was all very sordid.

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Neither of them slept very well that night. About two in the morning, Malcolm found that his indignation was evaporating. He became conscious of pity for the little girl who tossed, and sometimes snuffled her tears, at his side. He stretched out a hand, and it touched a bare, soft shoulder.

"Gracie," he whispered. She did not answer at first. "Gracie . . ."

"Yes, Malcolm."

"Gracie, I'm sorry I spoke like that. Please, Gracie, we've got to try to love each other always. It's bad enough . . . Gracie."

She slipped into his arms and murmured foolish things into his breast.

### IV

While Gracie sat one afternoon of March, thoughtful before the gas fire in Charlwood Street, a car drew up at the door. Glancing incuriously towards the window, she saw descend from the car a tall young man of cheerful aspect. The door bell rang. She ignored the ring. She was not used to callers. Only the milkman rang for her. But nobody from upstairs answered the summons, and she obeyed the second ring. Thus she encountered a freckled face that grinned at her amiably. The young man lifted his bowler hat.

"I say," he began, "are you Mrs. Tweedie, by any chance?"

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"Yes," said Gracie suspiciously.

"Good egg!" The young man put out his hand and shook hers vigorously. "I'm Crompton. Perhaps your husband has spoken about me."

"Oh! Dr. Crompton . . ."

"That's the man. I say, do you think you could be a Christian and give me a cup of tea?"

She took him in. She was delighted. She liked Crompton. It was a joy for her to serve him with tea and see his hearty way with the buttered toast she hurried to make. What a nice man! And Malcolm had never asked him to come along! So frank and pleasant and kind: thus she thought of Crompton, for she had been starved of human sympathy. He talked to her as to an old friend.

"I say," he said, looking round the cheerless room, "pardon my mentioning it, Mrs. Tweedie—Oh, I say, what's your first name? Well, I say, Gracie, if you promise not to heave me out, these are pretty shabby digs the old lad's brought you to."

He twinkled at her kindly through his glasses. She felt that she could confide in this nice man.

"Oh, I wish we were out of them! If you only saw the kitchen!"

"I know. I know. Pimlico digs are pretty notorious. Do you mean to tell me that that young man of yours is going to stay with Gandy at St. Olave's and live here forever?"

"Oh, well!" She was prepared to defend her

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Malcolm. "He's so terribly keen. If Malcolm's happy . . ."

"Malcolm be blowed! Malcolm's happy enough, and he's by jugfuls the best man Gandy ever had. But that's not the point. I'll talk to the old stiff. He'll be in soon, I suppose."

Malcolm came before they had finished tea and was overwhelmed by Crompton.

"My dear old bird! I wondered what on earth had happened to you. I had to track you down like a sleuth and make friends with your wife. You didn't tell me about this marriage, my lad, eh? What about that?"

They joked and gossiped for a time. It was just the same old Crompton, as frivolous and lovable as ever. But Malcolm was uneasy. He feared the franknesses of which his friend was capable, and he trembled when Crompton addressed him in his mock-accusatory tone.

"I say, young fellow——"

"Oh, I know what you're going to say," Malcolm interposed hastily.

"Oh, you do, do you? That's all right, then. But you didn't know that I came here to ask you to come along and make a partnership with me in Kensington. The governor died three months ago."

It silenced Malcolm. He glanced from Crompton to Gracie. The metallic cough of the sick child rose from below.

"What?" he gasped.



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"I said you'd better shove along to Kensington and come into partnership. That's taken the wind out of his sails, Gracie."

Malcolm smiled slowly. He turned his eyes away and looked out into the gathering dusk. He shook his head.

"No," he said at last. "It can't be done. It's terribly good of you, Crompton. I'm tremendously grateful, but—it can't be done."

He glanced again at Gracie. She was staring into the fire. Crompton rose.

"All right, old son," he said lightly. "You'll come yet. I'll give you another year at the most. You pitch into him, Gracie, and teach him some sense."

"You won't, neither you nor Gracie. You don't understand."

"We'll see," said Crompton.

Malcolm came back from the door and fell on his knees at her feet. He took her hands in his and looked her in the eyes.

"Gracie, darling! You understand?"

"Yes, dear. I understand," she said softly.

## CHAPTER X

### I

THERE are many paths to fame, but there is no infallible direction for the finding of any one of them. Malcolm Tweedie dreamed of fame, worked for fame, and did not find it. Of all the Tweedie family he was the most likely candidate for distinction. A lad of parts, he would make his mark: so it was prophesied by his female relations and his teachers alike. It is an interesting commentary on our modern civilization that not Malcolm Tweedie but Jock Tweedie his brother, earned the honours that the British public awards to its great entertainers.

Malcolm had brains, and that was something, but Jock had muscle and a genius for football, and that was something more. From a junior team in the suburbs of Glasgow he graduated to a First League club and became a marked man. "One of the Rovers' most promising recruits," wrote the experts, "a future international. Certain managers south of the Border have their eye on this clever youngster, but Trainer McNulty knows a good thing when he has it."

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The day came, however, when Trainer McNulty realised that a good thing can be turned into cash. Paragraphs in the evening papers of London and Glasgow hinted at sensational transactions toward. An atmosphere was created. Would Tweedie go south? was the question debated in public houses in Lanarkshire, in Lancashire, in London, on Tyne-side, in the Potteries. There was a fortnight of suspense; then the suspense was broken. "Ladbrooke's Great Capture," said the contents bills in the Strand one night. On prominent pages of the evening sheets, under tiers of bold captions, were columns that told of a sensational transfer "at what is understood to be a record fee. Interviewed at Quintin Park this afternoon, Manager Harper smilingly declined to mention the figure."

It was an item of news apparently of more importance than a peculiarly nasty sort of war in China and the sale of an English masterpiece to an American millionaire, and even Malcolm, a careless reader of the newspapers, had to take account of it. He laughed when he read it on the top deck of a No. 24 bus. It was impossible for him to take as a serious affair any incident in the life of his brother Jock. Of Jock's rise as an athlete he had heard from home, but neither Jock nor football could appeal to him as a matter of importance. Malcolm chuckled over the gullibility of the London Press. Photographs of Jock's gothic features were actually

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reproduced in the papers—that silly old face. Malcolm chuckled again. He rehearsed the manner in which he would crack this tremendous jest over the tea table for the benefit of Gracie.

Gracie did not think it at all funny. She had never encountered Jock, but that the papers should give this prominence to the affairs of Malcolm's brother seemed to her a very impressive fact.

"But he'll be coming to London," she observed solemnly.

"That's the idea, Gracie," said Malcolm facetiously. "Ladbroke Grove's in London."

The implication of her remark did not reach him. He could not yet appreciate that the fame of Jock was a reality. London, he would have reflected, is a big place. The idea that at this late hour his life could again touch the crude existence of Jock did not occur to him.

When, two days later, a letter arrived from his mother, he frowned over its rambling lines. It was a mournful letter. Mournfulness had grown on Mrs. Tweedie since her sons had both deserted her in circumstances so shameful. No letter of hers to Malcolm had failed to chide him and Gracie. And now it appeared that Jock had grievously injured her. He, too, was going to London, far away from home, leaving his mother and father to a lonely old age. Mrs. Tweedie indicated in her imperfect prose that she had been the unwilling vehicle of a stubborn and ungrateful generation.

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Through the reproachful sentences Malcolm skimmed quickly. He knew the manner too well. Then his attention was collected by a passage in which his mother passed from reproach to pleading. It became clear that Mrs. Tweedie, even though her elder son was a sportsman of international fame, regarded him as a peculiarly feckless type of individual. Jock would be lost in London, was her suggestion: Jock was not fit to keep his place in the struggle of metropolitan life. Anything might happen to him among those ruffianly footballers and bookmakers and what not.

Gradually it became clear to Malcolm that he was being charged with responsibility for the welfare of Jock in London. The letter ended with a tolerably plain proposal that Jock should live with Malcolm and Gracie in Pimlico.

"Oh, dash it all!" said Malcolm as he passed on the letter to Gracie.

She seemed to him to take a long time to read it. Impatiently he watched her expression, but it did not change. She finished, then folded the letter deliberately.

"Well, he can't come here, that's one thing," she said decisively.

It was precisely what he had thought, but his mind revolted at once when the opinion came from her. It was, somehow, as if she objected to the Tweedies, to his own people. There was something belligerent in her tone.

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"Why not?" he asked stubbornly.

"Because there is no room, silly!" she explained, wondering at his obtuseness. "Where could he sleep? In the bath in the kitchen?"

"Don't be silly. What's wrong with the sofa there?"

"I'm just not going to have him sleeping on any sofa—making a mess of the dining room and a lot of trouble before breakfast every morning."

That was reasonable. Malcolm had to recognise the fact. He strove to master himself. These tiffs with Gracie were becoming far too frequent.

"You're not very hospitable, old girl," he said. "After all, he's my brother."

"I know that perfectly well, Malcolm, and I wish we could put him up. But we can't, and I'm not going to make a mess of my house for anybody."

"All right, all right," he said peevishly.

It was growing on Malcolm that a wife was a thing to be reckoned with. His simple mind paused frequently before the indubitable and vaguely astonishing fact that Gracie had a personality and a will of her own, that Gracie was capable of opposition. Two hearts that beat as one—very pretty, he reflected ruefully, but not a very exact piece of observation. It annoyed him that Gracie should have developed this marked individuality. It saddened him that two people, however much in love, are capable of hurting each other so sorely. Nor

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could he quite see what was to be done about it. No doubt it would all work out for the best in the end. Meanwhile, he had his work to do.

The problem of Jock was not again referred to until, one Saturday morning, a telegram reached Charlwood Street. "Arriving Euston six-thirty to-night, Jock," it said. Husband and wife looked at each other steadily.

"Does that mean he's coming here?" asked Gracie coldly.

"I suppose so," replied Malcolm.

"To stay?"

"I suppose so."

She said nothing. They hardly spoke through that long day. But Malcolm, idle, saw that she was busy all the afternoon with blankets and sheets. At least, she was not going to make a row about it. When in the evening he brought Jock into the dingy dining room, Gracie had a cheerful welcome for her brother-in-law. It was as if they had been good friends for years. Certainly it could not be said of Jock that he was fastidious or difficult to entertain. When she explained to him her difficulty in bedding him, he laughed.

"Ach, I'm all right! I'll doss it out on the floor, if ye like."

They were quite a cheerful party over the haddock and poached egg that Gracie, by a special effort with the rusty gas stove, cooked for supper.



The change that Malcolm observed in Jock was purely physical. His brother had grown to be a giant, with all the height of his father, but with an impressive solidity of bone and muscle. He filled a doorway, so that Gracie exclaimed whenever he entered a room of the tiny flat. One night he undertook to move some furniture for her, and it was as if the sideboard were an empty soapbox. It did not appear, however, that his brains had developed commensurately. He was just the same old Jock—genial and stupid, uncritical and simple. To him Malcolm was always “the wee Professor.” His affectionate awe of his clever brother was patent. At the same time there was no doubt that Jock had only a vague idea as to Malcolm’s functions at St. Olave’s and not the least curiosity about them.

“How many folk have you poisoned the day?” he would ask jocularly when Malcolm returned in the evening. And it was no use trying to explain.

Gracie could not help loving the man. He was always ready to help her. Jock took the rust off the gas stove in the kitchen. Jock repaired a sluggish ball-cock in the cistern. Jock could always be counted on to hold a cut of five-ply fingering while she wound a ball. He went shopping with her, carried her basket, and every day bought her a pound of chocolates, a box of dates, or a

bundle of magazines. It was good to have his company. When she wished to see the British Museum, Jock went with her and followed her round those austere galleries. She apologised to him.

"Ach, I'm all right," he declared. "You go on, Gracie. I'll stick it."

But the mummies did interest him extremely.

"Gosh!" he said. "Thousands and thousands of years! but it was a daft kind o' way o' burying folks."

The fact remained that Jock's good-humoured complacency did not allow him to observe that his presence in Charlwood Street was in any way awkward. Three weeks passed; the Ladbrooke Rangers had not started serious training. For most days of the week, Jock was about the flat, eating meals. Sometimes he talked vaguely of looking for lodgings, but he did nothing in that direction. He was still a stranger to London, and he liked company. The comparative discomfort of a shakedown on a sofa did not irk his solid frame in the slightest degree.

His presence mattered little to Malcolm. On the whole he was pleased that Gracie had company. That, at all events, was how he put it to himself. In reality, there was in his subconsciousness a certain degree of relief that the long lonely nights in the barren dining room—nights so full of the risk of domestic irritation—had been

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made sociable, even gay, by the intervention of Jock. Just then, Malcolm had need to concentrate on his work. He wanted to think. His experiments in the laboratory were at that moment of absorbing interest, and the presence of Jock allowed him with impunity to retire within himself. He believed that Gracie was content with the circumstances as they had turned out. In bed one night he dared to sound her.

"It's quite good fun, having Jock for a bit," he observed generously.

"For a bit—yes," she replied enigmatically. "Jock's all right."

He let that go. He was drowsy. The sound of her voice actually wakened him out of a doze.

"I wonder when he's going to look for lodgings, all the same," he heard her say.

"Why, what's wrong?" he said.

"There's nothing wrong. But do you realise, Malcolm, that Jock's being here costs us at least an extra pound a week?"

"What?" Now he was completely awake.

"Do you think you can feed an extra mouth for nothing? All my bills are nearly double! Not to speak of gas and light and the laundry and him ordering the *Athletic News* every week. It's all down in *my* bills."

"Good Lord!" said Malcolm faintly.

That aspect of hospitality had not occurred to him. A pound a week! It was serious, almost

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calamitous. Wakeful through the dreary hours, Malcolm saw the charge as a monstrous burden. It was something they simply could not afford. It was not merely a matter of embarrassment: this meant ruin. Again he realised with dread on what unstable foundations he had built his house.

Jock must go. But how to indicate to Jock that he must go? The genial simplicity of the man was disarming. He had money, of course. There had been for his private purse a substantial percentage of the transfer fee, and the Ladbroke Rangers paid their new centre-forward a solid weekly wage. Malcolm had no doubt that Jock would in an emergency give him all he possessed. But Jock had no sense of emergency, and you simply couldn't put it to him bluntly. As for asking him to look for lodgings, it was like putting a child on the street.

So Malcolm did nothing, and Gracie waited for Malcolm to do something, and Jock remained with them in happy oblivion. Now the interest in Jock's presence had evaporated. Again a consciousness of strain fell between Malcolm and Gracie. He saw on her face the marks of worry and peevishness. It seemed to him sometimes that she looked ill. He found her weeping alone in the kitchen one night. She appeared to him to go about always as if she had some large private obsession of unhappiness. He was vaguely, if not violently, disturbed. It was all such a blessed, rotten mix-up, the whole affair!

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Tired after a wearing day in the laboratory, when Gandy had raged over the ruin of an expensive piece of apparatus, Malcolm came home one evening to find the flat apparently empty. There was neither fire nor light in kitchen or dining room or bedroom. It was strange, but he concluded that Gracie and Jock had gone on some jaunt together. They had taken to exploring London along the more mysterious bus routes. He settled down to read his evening paper.

After five minutes of perfect silence a slight noise startled him. It was in the flat. He tightened the grip of his hand on the paper and listened. A lock clicked; the noise came from the hall. Somebody had emerged from the miserable cupboard under the stairs. He looked round nervously. The door opened, and he saw his wife standing there, her hair untidy, her face blotchy with weeping. He stared at her.

"I'm going to have a baby," she said.

She said it emptily, stating a hateful fact against which there was no appeal. It was as if she spoke not to her husband but to an indifferent public.

"Gracie!" he cried.

Little Gracie, burdened with anxiety and fear! Little Gracie, who had gone into the dark cupboard to cry! He ran towards her and took her into his arms.

"Gracie! Gracie! My own Gracie!"

It was all he could say. Again and again he

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kissed her wet face, tasting the salt of her tears, and she sobbed against his breast. It was overwhelming. There passed through his mind a ludicrous memory of fictional representations of such moments. The wife should come to him, blushing with shy pleasure, full of coy and happy hints.

Suddenly she conquered her instinct to weep. Wrenching herself out of his grasp, she went to the door.

"I must get the tea ready," she said.

Queer things, women. Malcolm had the sense to leave her alone while she prepared their evening meal. It was always something that Jock was not expected until late that night. Malcolm found that his evening paper had lost its interest.

Calmly they came back to the subject over the tea table. Gracie had for the moment mastered emotion. Now she could face a practical domestic problem. Together they talked of it with great solemnity. She told him the secret history of her pregnancy.

She had had it on her mind for more than a month. The first natural sign had frightened her, but such things happened, and Jock came, and she had postponed her worry. Then the full month passed, and in the mornings she was squeamish, and her days were miserable with a seminausea, so that it was agony to go about with Jock. Finally she had faced the issue that afternoon. The doctor

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had not taken the matter very solemnly. Indeed, he had smiled at her and said that he had no doubt at all. These symptoms did occur abnormally, but after all, Mrs. Tweedie . . .

"It's no use pretending, Malcolm," she said miserably. "He's right. I know he's right. I'm going to have a baby."

"Good Lord!" said Malcolm vacantly. Then he pulled himself together. "Let's go for a walk to-night, Gracie. We can't stay here, with Jock coming in and that."

It was a walk that neither of them could ever forget. That dismal peregrination of the dark Pimlico streets and the tearful talk they had formed a critical passage in their lives. In these two hours of aimless wandering and dismal conversation they had to accommodate themselves to a shattering change of habit. They found that the accommodation was by no means easy or pleasant. It was dark in the streets, and Gracie wept again, and it was difficult to strive with logic against her apprehensions.

Malcolm took it at first that she feared child-birth. He knew very well that she had reason for that apprehension, but it surprised him that the mere fact of womanhood conferred on her this prophetic sense. He realised then the burden of sex, the significance of an age-old lore. Then it appeared through her sobbing that she wanted this baby, wanted it passionately. And then that she



did not want it. And that they could not afford it. And that it would be wonderful to have a wee baby of their own. . . . Malcolm could find no point at which to attack her indecision. He found himself speaking with glib gravity, but he could not even convince himself.

Up St. George's Road they went and through the busy streets about Victoria until they came to Eaton Square. It was round and round that dignified oblong, before the shuttered mansions of the rich, that they walked and talked for an hour. Talked. At the corner of Lyall Street, under a lamp-post, she stopped and burst into a paroxysm of sobbing. It was like hysteria. He took her hands and begged her to explain, and a new aspect of her sorrow was laid before him.

She mourned because their life together was over. They had been so happy together, just the two of them. And now it was all finished. Another creature was coming between them.

"But wait, darling, till you have your baby in your arms. *Our* baby!"

But no—she could not see the baby as anything but an interloper, unwelcome. Her protest silenced him, and he seemed to see that she was right, that the blessed fastness of their love was to be invaded and defiled. There was simply no getting over that. It would be wonderful to have the baby, but another wonder, now revealed as infinitely precious, was to be shattered.

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The bleakness of the prospect she put before him almost silenced him. But though the best of his mind grappled with the vague, potential problems of the future, he had in her unrestrained grief an immediate task to face. The need of the moment was to soothe her. So he spoke gravely, very reasonably, as they walked round and round the dark plantations of the square. He found that he could be eloquent on the philosophy of living. Before long she was arguing solemnly with him and had dried her tears. His arm linked under hers, her hand in his, they went home against a smirr of rain.

"There's one thing anyway," said Malcolm as he opened the big door in Charlwood Street: "Jock's got to get out of this pretty quick."

"Oh, I must get to bed before he comes," she answered hastily.

Jock was late that night. Big Ben had banged twelve before he appeared.

"Where's Gracie?" he asked at once.

"She's gone to bed," said Malcolm.

"Nothing wrong, is there?" Jock, taking off his shoes, raised a genuinely anxious face.

"Well, as a matter of fact, there is," said Malcolm, smiling nervously. "As a matter of fact, she's going to have a baby."

"G'on!" exclaimed Jock. He looked at Malcolm with a vague, startled face, his mouth hanging open. "Is that a fact?"

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"I'm afraid it is."

"G'on!"

It was too much for Jock. His slow mind could not master at once the significance of the announcement. He brooded over it for a time.

"Gor, but that's great!" he said at length and added thoughtfully. "Poor wee Gracie!"

Then he rose, grinned genially at Malcolm, took his hand and wrung it heartily.

"Ye're a great wee man, Professor!" said Jock.

At once there came over Malcolm a queer feeling of seniority. He saw that Jock was but an amiable boy. He spoke like a father.

"By the way, old man, I'm going to ask you to find digs for yourself. You see, Gracie—well it's a bit awkward for her. And the house is so small."

"Sure," said Jock, "I was thinking about that just the other day. Don't you worry, my lad, I'll slide out in a day or two."

"No hurry, of course. But you understand?"

"Put it there, Professor," said Jock, holding out his large hand.

### III

Jock went, and his going amounted to a complete disappearance. He went off one night with his luggage, leaving behind him an address in North Kensington and an effusive promise to call and see them often. Gracie had been a real wee sport;

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they must come up and see one of the big games at Quintin Park. He indicated a continuance of very cordial relationship. And that was the last of Jock for months.

Gracie was offended by his neglect of the proprieties. After all, they had spent a good deal of money on him and turned the house upside down. Once she wrote to him, asking him to come to supper on a Sunday evening, but there was no reply.

"I think he might have answered, anyhow," complained Gracie.

Malcolm laughed. "Jock couldn't even hold a pen. If you want to get him, you'll have to go and dig him out."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" said Gracie haughtily. "If he doesn't want to come, I'm sure I won't beg him."

There was at least no doubt as to Jock's very sound health. The week-end papers were apt to stress the remarkable character of his physical achievements. Jock had become famous: there was no question about that. The fact took a queer hold on Gracie's mind. Probably he was making money. Whereas Malcolm, her husband, who was manifestly a better man than Jock, was by no means famous and was decidedly poor. That rankled sorely. Gracie did not, however, communicate her sentiments to Malcolm. It is an ungrateful world, she concluded sadly. And the baby was coming.

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The weeks of her probation passed more quickly than she liked to realise, and the defection of Jock troubled her because it accentuated her loneliness. She could not bear to think of facing her dark ordeal alone in London. Jock was a convenient symbol of the companionship of friends and relations, and he became important in her brooding mind. When she did meet him by accident one day, it was for her like a rediscovery of self-respect.

She had gone shopping in Wilton Road and had reached the station gates when she saw him looking into the window of a shop on the other side of the street. Her heart jumped, and she nearly cried to him above the noises of the traffic. Could it be that he was on his way to pay her a visit? It was a confectioner's window into which he gazed; naturally he would come to Charlwood Street bearing gifts. Dodging the taxicabs that thronged round the station, she crossed the road and touched his arm.

"Hullo, Gracie!" he cried. "Where did you spring from?"

"We haven't seen you for a long time," she countered.

"That's a fact," he admitted. It became plain to Gracie that he was not glad to see her at that moment. Discomfort showed in his amiable face. He fidgeted and spoke awkwardly. "I'm just waiting for somebody."

So his presence in Pimlico could not be construed

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to her credit. She was hurt and wanted to hurry away.

"Oh, well. Don't let me keep you," she began; then she had to look up into the enquiring face of a woman who had come out of the shop and joined them.

"I'm ready now," said the woman to Jock.

"Oh, just a minute, Hannah. This is my sister-in-law." He blushed and proceeded, formally, to go through with the introductory ceremonial popular in Clydeside parlours. "A Miss Bunt to a Mrs. Tweedie."

"Pleased to meet you," said Miss Bunt in a booming contralto.

"How do you do?" said Gracie.

They shook hands and exchanged looks. Each saw the other's swift feminine glance of stock taking, that remarkable optical performance, which seems to take in hat, face, clothes and shoes in one vertical, comprehensive sweep. Gracie found herself nervous in this surprising presence.

"Were you going anywhere?" she stammered. "Have you time to come round and have a cup of tea? It's not far, just round the corner."

Jock glanced hopefully at his companion. "What about it, Hannah? We're in no hurry."

"It's awfully good of you, I'm sure," boomed Miss Bunt.

In the grey, unflattering light that came through the window of the dining room in Charlwood

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Street Gracie studied with the cold and merciless eyes of a woman the person of Miss Hannah Bunt. She saw a spectacular creature. Miss Bunt's hair was the colour of straw. She inclined to high colour in her clothes and on her face, where the lilac powder lay thick round her scarlet lips. Her person seemed to throw off waves of a heavy perfume. She carried a large and imposing bag of gold mesh.

It was in the face of Miss Bunt that Gracie found herself most interested. There were lines upon it that the paint and powder could not conceal. They radiated finely from the corners of her eyes; they ran more heavily from nose to mouth. It was very plain that Miss Bunt, desperately seeking to be taken for twenty-two, would not see thirty-seven again. That anxiety showed in her hard, nervous eyes. It showed still more clearly in her fiercely possessive attitude towards Jock. Gracie knew that Miss Bunt had made a capture and meant to hold it. She saw that Jock was inextricably in the grip of a tenacious woman.

At first, Gracie was suspicious of mystery. Miss Bunt resembled superficially a type of woman that was, in Gracie's mental phrase, no better than she should be. Then she realised that Miss Bunt was a woman of almost vehement respectability. She talked much of things that were "low." Night clubs, river parties, the cocaine traffic—of that sort of thing she expressed a great horror.



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"Vulgar, I call it," said Miss Bunt. "Those society gels—I know what I'd do if I was their ma."

Then she spoke cunningly but sympathetically of the more private habits of royalty. Miss Bunt shook her head and pursed her lips in the manner of an indulgent matron. There were things she could tell. . . .

"But such a sweet boy," she crooned. "Pity 'e doesn't marry and settle down with a nice gel."

"It is indeed," said Gracie.

"Give the lad his flakin' chance," said Jock, rallying to the flag of masculinity.

The ladies exchanged gestures to indicate that that was men all over. Miss Bunt had a third cup of tea, which she held in a very refined manner with the little finger prettily curled. She pleased Gracie by asking where she bought such delicious tea. It was better tea than she, Miss Bunt, got at Lady Gosling's, where she was apparently a frequent and welcome caller.

"Sir Simon's wife, you know—the Alderman," she explained.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Gracie.

In due course it came out exactly why Miss Bunt had enjoyed such distinguished social opportunities. Mr. Bunt was the landlord of the Dog Star public house, Kensal Green, a man of substance, a Parish Councillor, a leader in Conservative politics, and a director (with Sir Simon

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Gosling, among others) of the Ladbroke Rangers Football Club, Ltd.

"You really must come up and see us, Mrs. Tweedie," Miss Bunt insisted as she rose to go. "Do come. Any day. Come on a Saturday and bring your husband. We'd be charmed. Come and see Jock play, and then we'll have tea at home."

"Oh, that would be lovely!" said Gracie ecstatically. Anything to break the monotony of her life.

"That's fixed, then," said Miss Bunt. "I'll write and tell you. Good-by, Mrs. Tweedie. So pleased to have met you."

And yet Gracie did not give a very flattering description of her to Malcolm when he came home in the evening.

"The paint, Malcolm! You should have seen it. Thick's not the word for it. And the way she keeps her eye on Jock! She's forty if she's a day, that one."

"Why did you say we'd go up and see them, then?" grumbled Malcolm.

"I couldn't turn her down right away, could I?"

### IV

That old-established free house, the Dog Star, dominates a crossing that for the inhabitants of those parts of North London represents the centre of the universe, but is for less prejudiced creatures

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a featureless spot in a dismal suburb. It is a flashy house of refreshment with many windows, lights and mirrors and much plush, and the two-storey dwelling house above it seemed to the astonished eyes of Gracie to have been decorated in much the same spirit. After the poverty of Charlwood Street, Mr. Bunt's array of silver-plated cups, chandeliers, gasoliers and clocks seemed blatantly magnificent. She had never before seen a house so crowded with spectacular objects. Obviously there was money in this house, and she could not understand why it had been applied with such a large, lavish disregard for refinement.

It was her first contact with Cockney taste. At all events, the rooms made a perfect setting for Miss Hannah Bunt and her father. Mr. Bunt, a widower, turned out to be a round, red little man of hearty manner, who was apparently by no more than twenty years the senior of his daughter. He was wearing in the house a bowler hat and a blue overcoat, and there was no mistaking his complete identification with the English tradition of sport. He welcomed his visitors boisterously.

"Come along, come along!" he cried. "Any friend of Jock Tweedie's welcome 'ere. Take this chair, my dear." He put an arm round Gracie and led her to a seat. "There ain't much time, but there's always time for a drink, as the police-

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man said to the cook. Eh? A glass o' port, my dear? There you are! Sound stuff that is, I don't mind telling you. And now, ladies and gen'lemen, here's luck to good ol' Ladbroke, coupled with the name of Britain's finest centre-forward—Jock Tweedie. *Salve!*"

Mr. Bunt drained his glass at a gulp. The effort seemed to leave his thick neck redder than ever.

"I stand to win or lose a hundred of the best to-day, I don't mind telling you. All ready, ladies and gents? Right! We'll get along."

They got along in a Ford car driven with spirit by Mr. Bunt.

"You come along o' me in front, my dear," he invited Gracie, eyeing her appreciatively. "Don't worry, there'll be no canoodlin' in the back seat. 'Annah's got her eye elsewhere. Eh?"

The engine started with a whirr, and Mr. Bunt pulled himself up to the wheel with a plethoric effort. Talking all the time, he guided his vehicle into the press of trams and buses that were making towards Quintin Park. Gracie was assured that it was to be a great day, that she might count herself lucky in being privileged to assist—and in the Directors' Box—at a Cup Tie of shuddering importance. "Coo!" said Mr. Bunt when she admitted that she had never seen Jock Tweedie on the ball. Mr. Bunt implied that her education had been neglected.

"It was due to me 'e came 'ere," said Mr. Bunt.

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"Paid a pretty price for 'im, I don't mind telling you. The trouble I 'ad to get it through the Board! Cool! But it was worth it, an' double. We're rakin' the stuff in now, I don't mind telling you. E's a bobbydazzler, 'e is!"

Mr. Bunt went on to declare his vast satisfaction in having made the close acquaintance of Jock—as modest a fellow as ever stepped. Jock had brought joy to the 'ouse. Our 'Annah there . . . Mr. Bunt's elbow caught Gracie in the ribs.

"They're gettin' thick, them two. Think *I* don't see wot's workin' up! But they can't kid me."

Mr. Bunt broke off to ply a Klaxon horn with vigour. A crowd of men, streaming before a gate, parted dutifully, impressed by the vast red and black rosette in the lapel of Mr. Bunt's smart blue overcoat. A policeman saluted. The car passed through the gates into a bleak paddock under the precipitous rear of a grand stand.

"'Ere we are, then!" cried Mr. Bunt, stopping his car. "'Op out, ladies and gents. All chynge. I'll see you settled, and then you'll 'ave to excuse me."

They climbed dark stairs and came out at last into a sort of cabin on the roof of the stand. Through a great window with sliding panes they saw in bird's-eye view the green oblong of turf and the packed terraces of the arena. Gracie gasped at the sight and at the completeness of the view, at the tremendous shifting mass of spectators,

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at the feeling of tension that seemed to rise from the terraces to this privileged eyrie on the roof. Mr. Bunt, smiling with pride, saw them installed in their chairs.

"Bit of all right, eh?" he said. "Now what about a glass o' port? No? Well, you'll excuse me, but I must run and 'ave a chat with the boys."

He went, and they waited expectant. Miss Bunt, assuming command, spoke to Malcolm in the manner of one to whom these high occasions were familiar and a little vulgar. She let it be understood in her vibrant contralto that she had been here before, assisting at occasions even more spectacular. She calculated that not more than sixty thousand people had passed through the turnstiles that afternoon. But when Malcolm put in a mild claim for the peculiar glories of Hampden Park in Glasgow, she silenced him with a pitying, "Really!"

Gracie did not join in the conversation. She found herself painfully excited. It was awful, somehow, to look down on those thousands that had come to witness combat. Faces and caps, moving creepily like a gigantic cluster of swarming insects, made a huge mottled wall above the pitch. She clutched the ledge before her when two men carrying a stretcher trotted across the turf and bore back a patient to the pavilion. His bowler hat lay ludicrously on his stomach.

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"Too much beer," said Miss Bunt mercilessly.

Then the crowd began to roar, and Gracie could have wept. There was a dark, feral note in that roar which greeted the players bounding on to the field. They took their positions, and there was a pause that was unbearable. A thin spurt of sound from the whistle, and twenty men set themselves in violent motion. For the first time in her life Gracie realised the beauty of football skilfully played, the splendour of strong men in vivid action, the heady allure of partisanship. It was almost too much for her. She wanted to cry out at the crises of the game. She could not bear to see a swift forward, eager on the ball, brought down in full flight.

And she saw the wonder of Jock. Jock, her clumsy, amiable lout of a brother-in-law! But this was another man—a streak of light, an acrobatic artist, a pillar of strength, a splendid thing of male muscularity. When the ball came his way, she clutched the ledge. When he ran towards the goal, the whole volition of her will was with him, and she sobbed. "Go on, Jock! Go on! Go on! Go on!" till Malcolm laughed at her and she smiled back through tears. Three times that afternoon this mighty brother of hers swept victoriously to the goal mouth and drove the ball into the net. Three times Gracie shuddered at the roar that rose from the terraces, and three times she sobbed with-



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out restraint over the dash and brilliance of Jock transfigured.

"Dear me, but that was terrible!" she sighed when the whistle blew for the last time.

She turned to look into the radiant face of Mr. Bunt.

"That," said Mr. Bunt, "was what I call a gyne."

The joy of the round, little man was a pleasure to behold. His was a paternal pride, and he babbled to Gracie all the way home of the boys—good boys they were, every one. But for the peculiar glory of Jock he could not find words that were adequate, such was his excitement. Gracie feared that his indifference to the mechanical task of driving would lead the Ford into calamity. And the smell of whisky clung round Mr. Bunt. But they came safely to the Dog Star and a gigantic meal awaiting them in the dining room.

It was a meal of which Gracie was at pains to calculate the price. To her it was overwhelming and bespoke wealth. A great York ham—the very best, four shillings a pound. Two cold roast chickens. Smoked salmon. Cheese of three kinds. An inexhaustible supply of bread and the finest butter. Celery. Pickles and sauce in infinite variety. The table was like a grocery counter in Harrod's. And Mr. Bunt kept on opening bottles, of which a variegated platoon burdened the side-board. His hospitality was inescapable.

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"Another slice of 'am, my dear?" And it was on her plate before she could protest: or, "Don't let me see your glass go empty. It ain't allowed in this 'ouse. 'Annah! A drop o' that chutney for this young lady 'ere."

Mr. Bunt made a specialty of attending to Gracie. His daughter and Jock were by tacit consent allowed a *tête-à-tête* at the other end of the table. Mr. Bunt addressed his younger guests confidentially on the topic of the lovers.

"They 'it it off, these two, nicely," said Mr. Bunt. "Wouldn't be surprised if something comes of it, I wouldn't. Anyhow, 'ere's 'oping!" And he drank. "They'll be lucky, I don't mind tellin' you in confidence. You may not know it, my dear, but it's my 'umble intention to 'and the pub to them when Jock retires from the gyme. An' there's a tidy bit o' money in a 'ouse like this, I don't mind tellin' you. What do you think o' that, then?"

But they had to go back to Charlwood Street, and the dining room seemed meaner than ever. They sat down in silence before the sizzling gas fire, Malcolm with his evening paper, Gracie with her knitting. The hard cough of chronic bronchitis rose from the flat below.

"You haven't heard from Dr. Crompton lately?" asked Gracie, breaking the silence.

"No." Malcolm did not look up from his paper. The minutes passed. Then Gracie spoke again.

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"Jock's a lucky fellow," she said wistfully.

"I suppose he is," answered Malcolm automatically.

She glanced at his intent face, and saw that he had not appreciated the drift of her remarks.

## CHAPTER XI

### I

THE abiding interest of women in the tremendous affairs of gestation and birth dissipated at length the chill disapproval with which, since they had offended against the respectable canons of the North, Malcolm and Gracie had been regarded by their respective families. The thought of Gracie pregnant was too much for Miss Mackenzie on the one hand and Malcolm's mother on the other. Pregnant and alone in London! It was unthinkable to these two good women that the girl should bear the burden of her sex without the comfort of her kind. Virgin and matron were irresistibly stirred to rally round their sister in trouble.

Miss Mackenzie's offer of help was the first to reach Pimlico.

"But, dash it all!" grumbled Malcolm. "Where on earth is she going to sleep?"

"Where did Jock sleep?" retorted Gracie. "After all, my dear, when I'm ill there must be somebody to look after the house."

"Quite right, old girl," he agreed, "but it's going to be an awful squash of women. We'll have your precious stepmother next."

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"No, we won't. I wouldn't have her if I was dying."

He kissed her lightly, and it was his slow male admission of the fact that if she must suffer it would be among friends. He had a bleak premonition of his own decided insignificance in the forthcoming crisis. Well, he would live out somewhere and be quit of the pothor. The event promised to synchronize with the climax of his work at the laboratory. The fact allowed him to be generously indifferent to the domestic anxieties.

The letter of his mother made him realise a little more clearly the dramatic urgency of Gracie's case. Mrs. Tweedie had not consulted Miss Mackenzie; her decision to be present at the birth had been arrived at independently. She made it clear that the decision was a solemn one. A weary woman of nearly seventy could not lightly contemplate a journey to London and an anxious ordeal. At her time of life . . . But Mrs. Tweedie had a sense of duty. The lass would have an experienced woman at her side.

"It strikes me," said Malcolm cynically, "that they're a lot of inquisitive old wives. All this stuff about their duty and their anxiety to help!"

Gracie laughed. In her heart she was overjoyed by these warm promises of kindness and help. And it was good to be done with family quarrels. But she agreed that the presence of both ladies was neither necessary nor desirable.

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"I'll write and put her off," declared Malcolm. "We don't want the place turned into a Dorcas meeting."

"Yes, but put it nicely, Malcolm," pleaded Gracie. "Your mother's a dear to offer."

Malcolm was certainly tactful. Beneath his assumption of henpecked masculinity were a gratitude and a relief as sincere as those of Gracie. He was so sorry for his old, forsaken mother, so proud of the indomitable spirit that would venture into the alien world of London for the sake of a suffering girl. His explanations were elaborate.

And Mrs. Tweedie would have none of them. Mrs. Tweedie was coming to London, and that was flat. Miss Mackenzie—within the limitations of her prose style, Mrs. Tweedie let it be understood that a virgin of forty-five or so cannot be regarded as a satisfactory supervisor of the rites of parturition. Mrs. Tweedie had had two of her own: she ought to know. What was more, Mr. Tweedie had long dreamed of a holiday in London and proposed to avail himself of this most vital excuse. He intended to have some great days in the British Museum and other resorts of the thoughtful.

"Oh, dash it, they can't come!" declared Malcolm.

"You can't stop them, can you?" argued Gracie.

"That's so, I suppose," he admitted, "but they'll jolly well have to go into a hotel."

After all, the question was not urgent and could

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be held over. Malcolm had found that in matrimony a great many issues lose their urgency if tactfully held over. Wives have a habit of meeting trouble halfway: a curious product of the feminine fear of poverty. Here they were, at all events, with two months to go, and Malcolm dodged the problems.

"We'll see when the time comes," he said.

But the time came relentlessly. Malcolm discovered that a birth is not the sort of trouble that vanishes if ignored by the male. It transpired that the new baby would require clothes, napkins, towels—all sorts of things. The cost of a cot had to be faced. (He had an embarrassing half hour in a place in Oxford Street.) Then the baby would require a pram. It would also require a special bath, and a basket stocked with powder and cotton wool and pins, and sponge and soap of its own. Gracie spoke mysteriously of an ironing board. Then she thought of a clotheshorse.

It amazed Malcolm to find in his wife this hidden lore of maternity. It gave him a new respect for her, the respect he could always cherish for one who knew his job. There was even some fun in working it all out and making lists and drafting the notification of the birth that would go into the *Glasgow Herald*. But he could not escape the economic obsession. It was an expense, this baby, and the expense would not stop with the baby's birth. Presents came from Scotland, and the



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smaller purchases could be made out of the household cash, but there were solid accounts ahead. The doctor, for instance; and there would have to be a nurse for at least a fortnight—at three guineas a week. And if anything went wrong with Gracie . . .

“My gum!” said Malcolm to himself.

There were moments when he knew that it could not be done on his salary, moments when he realised the inexorable pressure of economic fact. The savings bank—not much hope there: the balance must be swallowed up. Sometimes he felt that he had blundered with Gracie into tragedy.

## II

Life goes on: life just goes on. There can be no perfect preparation even for the inevitable. A month before Gracie's hour was due to strike, Malcolm had felt that the problems would be mastered somehow. Then came the week of her trial, and he found himself in a muddle of hasty arrangements and unsatisfactory compromises. All that he could do was the thing that came first to his hand to do. For him existence lost all semblance of cohesion and sequence.

Miss Mackenzie was the harbinger of imminent drama. It had been decided by elaborate and tactful correspondence that she was to have pride of place over Mrs. Tweedie in the flat in Charlwood

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Street. The decision of Mr. Tweedie to see London in his seventieth year had made the arrangement simple in the long run. Malcolm had already booked a room for his parents in a boarding establishment in St. George's Road. The installation of Miss Mackenzie seemed to him the more formidable operation.

She arrived at Euston, beaming. It was Miss Mackenzie's first adventure in the metropolis, and she was prepared to be pleased by the double excitement of travel and birth. It even seemed to Malcolm, sensitive, that she took the affair of Gracie somewhat too lightly. Then he realised that this was just a simple virgin excited. All the way by tube to Victoria, Miss Mackenzie exclaimed.

"Dear me, Malcolm," she would shout above the rattle of the train in its narrow burrow, "to think I'd see this day!" Then she would go off at a hysterical tangent: "Gracie's baby will be a wee Cockney. Dear me!"

The meeting of aunt and niece curiously impressed Malcolm. The women wept together. Queer things, women—children in one way, and yet charged with a dark sense of great realities. They had a knowledge he could not share, an elusive freemasonry of which he illogically resented the existence.

"Well, let's have some food. Aunt Agnes must be starving," he interrupted the transports.

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The gambit came to nothing. Nothing that he could say was of interest to the women in this their hour. The meal over, they went off together to handle those little bits of things that had been got ready for the baby, to gloat over the symbols of fecundity. Malcolm could hear Miss Mackenzie in the bedroom.

"Aw, Gracie! Isn't that just sweet? Aw, Gracie—the wee thing! Aw, isn't that lovely! That's just my taste. You've been a clever wee girl."

And so on. Malcolm went out to walk the dark streets. He returned to a shakedown in the dining room, an elaborately coy arrangement having given to Miss Mackenzie his place at Gracie's side. He heard them chattering into the night. Women . . .

The arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Tweedie marked the penultimate stage in the proceedings. They did not come with the aplomb of Miss Mackenzie. They were old—it shocked Malcolm to see how they had aged—and the adventure of the journey had been beyond their capacities of physical resistance and social sagacity. They were nervous and flurried and apt to be irritable. Mrs. Tweedie's luggage was a source of anxiety. She struggled from the carriage, richly decorated with the mysterious paraphernalia of an aged person's travelling. Then her black box had to be got out of the van. She made a song about it.

"It's in the van, Malcolm. Ma black tin boax. In the van—the van at the back. Ma black tin boax. Hurry, or ye'll loss it."

"All right, mother," he soothed her. "I'll get it. Don't worry."

There was a crowd at the van, and he had to wait, and there he was joined in due course by his mother, impatient. She saw a corner of her box under a high pile of more distinguished luggage.

"There it is, Malcolm!" she cried. "Ma black tin boax. Quick and get it, quick and get it!"

Experienced travellers turned to smile, and Mr. Tweedie cut in irritably:

"Haud your tongue, woman! Haud your tongue! We can but take our turn."

Malcolm, desperate, got them into a taxicab at length. He could not face the task of shepherding them through the Underground. Mrs. Tweedie on an escalator! The good woman sighed with relief as she sank on the cushions, but her husband, bending forward eagerly, looked out with grave, intelligent eyes at the lighted streets of London.

"My, Malcolm!" he said seriously. "It's a great city, this."

"I hope that poor wee lass is keeping her heart up," said Mrs. Tweedie fondly.

Gracie, to be sure, was the nexus of the domestic situation. Mr. Tweedie might plan an elaborate series of expeditions into unknown London, but

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his wife's interest in the city was concentrated on one small flat in Charlwood Street. Once their luggage was deposited in the boarding house in St. George's Road, nothing would do for Mrs. Tweedie but an immediate journey round the corner to where Gracie sat gestating the new generation.

It was for Malcolm an amazingly confused evening. Mrs. Tweedie had to inspect the layette and pass mature judgment on its quality and adequacy. She spoke very learnedly of "hippens," and it was some time before Malcolm discovered that she talked in the Scots fashion of napkins. She roundly condemned dummy teats, declaring that there was nothing like regular feeding—from the breast.

"I'd pour their fancy foods down the jawbox, if I had ma way," said Mrs. Tweedie.

Malcolm had never seen his mother so vivacious, so fully charged with a burning interest. Some primitive force had reawakened in the old woman. When they were all in the dining room together, Mrs. Tweedie became reminiscent. She recalled the bad old days when babies were fed every two hours, day and night. She was reminded of Malcolm's difficulties of teething. She wept happily to remember these things. In fact, a thoroughly feminine evening. Even Mr. Tweedie, surrendering to the prevailing mood, told the sad story of his sister, Fanny, who had laboured for forty-eight hours with her firstborn. He was pounced upon.

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"Wheesht, Tam! Ye're no' to talk of things like that."

"I was juist mentioning it," said Mr. Tweedie mildly.

Gracie was undoubtedly the centre of interest. Malcolm watched her sitting there, heavy, silent, patiently smiling. Poor old Gracie! She was to go through with it so very soon. It seemed absurd that they should be sitting there, talking of the affair as if it were nothing. He saw, however, that she remained aloof, brooding warmly on her own wonderful fate, while they talked and talked about her.

"What are you going to call the wean?" Mrs. Tweedie demanded to know.

"Well, if it's a boy," said Miss Mackenzie, "it should be named after Malcolm's father, and if it's a girl, I hope they remember Gracie's poor mother. Pansy she was. A nice name for a wee girl."

"Ye'll have to see that the christening's done proper, Malcolm," said Mr. Tweedie.

They talked and talked.

### III

The atmosphere was thus created. It became simply a matter of waiting. First babies, unfortunately, are beings of irregular habits, and the waiting was a long business. Over Malcolm there came

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a feeling of stultification. What he did was mechanical. Day after day in the laboratory, then home to find that Gracie was as before, and that the party of elderly commentators had settled down again for an evening of reproductive debate. Neither Mrs. Tweedie nor Miss Mackenzie was ever far from the flat where Gracie awaited her trial. Only Mr. Tweedie succeeded in withdrawing his mind from these deliberations. He had seen the British Museum and had ascended the Monument. But when he mentioned these adventures, he was chided by his wife for indifference to Gracie's ordeal. Gracie was everything. The one significant moment of life was to be that in which she should first feel the harsh, premonitory pains of labour.

It was weary waiting. The moment was bound to come. The appointed day passed, and yet it did not come. Six days passed. At last, on the seventh evening, a Friday, Malcolm was met at the door by Miss Mackenzie.

"It's started," she said. Her face was white and scared.

"The doctor?" he asked sharply.

"He's been. He's coming back at eight. O Malcolm, there's just a fear that it may be difficult."

He walked straight through the hall and into the bedroom. A nurse rose from the fire as he entered, but he turned at once and bent over his wife's pale face.

"Gracie, darling," he said tenderly and kissed her.



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"Malcolm! O Malcolm!" she whispered.

She held his hand tightly in hers. Watching her closely, he saw her features convulse slightly. The convulsion passed, and she smiled again, but wanly.

"O Malcolm! It's sore."

"Yes, sweetheart. But it won't last long. Just a little whiff of chloroform, and you'll forget."

"Yes, Malcolm. Malcolm, don't go far away."

"No, dear. I'll be here all the time, near you. Lie quiet, dear, and don't worry."

"No, Malcolm. Not if you're near."

The nurse followed him out of the room and whispered gravely.

"Doctor is coming back at eight. He wishes to speak to you."

"Very well," said Malcolm irritably. "I'll see him."

He found himself extremely irritable, and for no good reason. When he saw that in the dining room the three older people had gathered together to await the issue, he could hardly speak for anger. And his father must produce the appropriately sententious word.

"It's going to be a difficult night, this, Malcolm, I doubt," said Mr. Tweedie.

He could have shrieked. Were they going to sit there like ghouls and listen to the cries of her in agony? Already they had adopted the funereal manner. They spoke in whispers.

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"Poor lassie! Poor wee lassie!" wailed Mrs. Tweedie.

"We may at least have tea," said Malcolm dryly.

He knew that he must sound indifferent, and he hoped he did. He wanted to be in violent opposition to these people. Then he might say something that would drive them away. He wanted to be alone. This was to be a stark, anxious trial, an agony, and the conventional sentiments of his elders were an affront to his sense of decency. Could they not go away and wait, while he and Gracie got through with the business?

He hardly spoke till he heard the doctor's cab pull up before the door. "Go and let him in," he said sharply to Miss Mackenzie.

He listened on edge to the muffled voices through the wall. A spell of silence nearly maddened him. A long, low moan from Gracie, and his breathing stopped. Then the voices again—a blessed relief. At last the bedroom door opened, and he heard the nurse and doctor whispering in the hall. He went out to meet them.

The doctor interviewed him in the dreary kitchen. The doctor, his face grave, sat on the edge of the bath and spoke bleakly:

"It's a worrying case, Tweedie. There's something not just right. In fact, it's going to be a teaser."

"You mean . . . something badly wrong?"

"I do, indeed."

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Malcolm stared at the man. It was incredible, damnable, intolerable.

"You mean . . . O my God! We can't let it hang like this. Would you like a consultation?"

"To be quite frank, I would," said the doctor.

Malcolm turned and ran for his hat and coat. He spoke quickly as he went:

"You hang on here. Keep her going, for dear God's sake. I'll get somebody. I know somebody. Half an hour . . ."

The door banged behind him.

Crompton—good old Crompton! His mind was filled in that moment of desperation with the sense of Crompton's solidity and reliability. If he could bring Crompton to Gracie's side, she would have as good a chance as she could have in London. Driven by that urgency, Malcolm ran the bleak, dark length of St. George's Road and swung on to a No. 11 bus that was lumbering down Buckingham Palace Road. But it went too slowly. There was a hold-up in Sloane Square. He should have taken a cab. It struck him as a very odd thing that the Scots tradition of economy should have led him, even in the hour of crisis, into an omnibus. It would be better to get out and run. But the bus might make good progress down the King's Road. He bit his nails and wished that the driver would go on and on and on as fast as possible.

From the stopping place at Beaufort Street he ran northwards through the dim streets of South

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Kensington. There was an awful doubt in his mind that Crompton would not be at home. He planned swiftly. If Crompton was out, he would take a cab to Harley Street and drag out the best man in the place. Kimble, for instance—Kimble, at any price. Nothing mattered but Gracie in pain and danger. He was near sobbing when he rang at the door of Crompton's house.

He was at home. By the mercy of God, Crompton was at home. He came running out of his consulting room to stare at his friend.

"My dear old boy! In the name of Heaven . . ."

Malcolm blurted out the news, and Crompton jumped for his coat and hat.

"You silly young ass! Why didn't you tell me long ago? Who's your man? Run for your blooming life. My car's over there against the railings. Come along!"

Crompton drove like a maniac. The car swung round the corners. Even Malcolm, plagued by anxiety, thought the speed insane. At Sloane Square, his friend, waving a preoccupied hand, ignored the policeman on point duty and shot along Cliveden Place. He missed a cab at the corner of Eaton Square by inches. There was a shouting behind them. The shouting died away in the rear.

"Fool!" muttered Crompton, his eyes steady on the road ahead.

He took the corner into Charlwood Street at

high speed and drew up at the door of the flat with his brakes squealing.

Malcolm lost Crompton then. Crompton disappeared into the sombre mystery of the room where Gracie lay in pain. There was nothing for Malcolm to do but moodily enter the dining room where his father and mother sat with Miss Mackenzie in mournful converse. Their pessimism seemed to come in a wave to meet him.

"It's a bad night for you, son," said Mr. Tweedie, sympathetically.

"Oh, she'll be all right," declared Mrs. Tweedie.

The facile verbal optimism of his mother irritated Malcolm. It was such a stupid thing to say. He could not be hopeful; and he dare not despair. He spoke coldly.

"We'd better wait and see," he said. "It's a job for the doctors. These things will happen."

"Ay, but it's a great pity," said Mr. Tweedie. "She's young, the wee lass."

Miss Mackenzie, in tears, could say nothing. It was as if they had already accepted the prospect of death. Their lugubrious presence was to the last degree embarrassing. Malcolm found that he could not show emotion among them. And yet he thought his heart must break. It was impossible to remain in the dining room. He went and sat alone on a wicker hamper in the kitchen and listened to the kick of an air lock in the pipes, to the hard cough of the sick child in the basement.

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The bedroom door opened at last. He called, and his voice sounded hollow and unreal:

"I'm here, Crompton. In here."

Crompton appeared. His face, designed by nature for the expression of heartiness, bore a look of anxiety that seemed to Malcolm ludicrous.

"It's a nursing home, old boy," Crompton said. "We must get her off at once."

"It's bad, Crompton? Oh, God, please . . ." sobbed Malcolm.

"Easy on, boy. It's not so bad. Only we can't work in that room. The presentation's not normal, and we must get her fixed up in a home. I'm going out now to arrange. Raith's standing by. Keep your pecker up. I won't be half an hour."

Half an hour. It passed somehow. Malcolm did not go back to the dining room. He had to be alone, even in that sordid kitchen with its stale, greasy smell and its base noises. He sat on the edge of the bath. From the room, now and again, came a moan of pain. He wrung his hands till his fingers cracked, and sobbed to himself.

"Gracie! Gracie! Poor wee Gracie! It won't be long, old girl. It won't be long."

Crompton came back, and Malcolm heard him hurry into the bedroom. There were noises of hasty movement in there, the mutter of voices, the tinkle of glasses and instruments. It was awful that drama, tragedy perhaps, should pass so close at hand while one of the players must sit immobile,

helpless. Malcolm felt that he should be vitally engaged in this affair of Gracie. After all, he was a doctor. But he was a husband first. He had to wait until he heard the shuffle of slow footsteps through the hall.

They were taking Gracie away. He ran out and met her eyes appealing to him dumbly. There was a slow, wry smile on her face. Swiftly he bent down and kissed her lips.

"Old girl . . ." he gasped. "It's all right. Be brave. Brave . . ."

Crompton's arm caught his shoulder. Kindly but firmly Malcolm was pushed back into the kitchen. He stood and stared blindly at the spout of the geyser. Through his confusion there reached his consciousness the sounds of an engine accelerating, of a brake lever released, of tyres crisping on the tarmac. Gracie was gone. Now he could do nothing for her: absolutely nothing. He could only wait.

The cold realisation brought him calm. He had discharged his obligation to his wife. She was in hands as good as he could find to help her. Quietly he went back to the dining room where his parents and Miss Mackenzie sat in a silence that was broken only by the sniffing of the women. Mr. Tweedie, his face pale with anxiety, looked up at his son.

"They've taken her away, Malcolm?"

"She's gone," Malcolm replied.

The old man turned slowly to his wife.



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"She's gone, Nance," he said dully. "They'll take awful good care of her, Nance."

"The poor lassie!" sobbed Mrs. Tweedie.

Malcolm stood behind the table and saw his elders in a pitiful group, and now he was moved by their grief. Calm himself, he was aware of compassion for their vicarious sorrow. Old people, it seemed to him, went under easily to the inevitable pains of life.

"You mustn't be too anxious," he heard himself saying. "They're common enough, these troubles. It's just because the house is so small. She'll be perfectly all right in the home."

"I'm very glad to hear it, Malcolm," said Mr. Tweedie gravely.

His logical habit of mind helped him to recover more quickly than the women. From the painful particular he passed to the interesting general.

"It's just the will of Providence," he observed mournfully. "There's some that gets through it easy and some that doesn't. But it's a wearing time." Slowly he took his pipe from the pocket where it had lain cold for hours and began the elaborate process of preparing it to function again. "Ay, it's a wearing time," said Mr. Tweedie.

Patiently and tactfully Malcolm persuaded his father and mother that they must go back to their boarding house and wait.

"I'll no' sleep a wink this night," Mrs. Tweedie declared.

"Oh, yes, you must, mother," protested Malcolm. "You'll not help Gracie. You can't help her. There's nothing to do but wait."

"I wouldna' trust these doctors the length of my foot," retorted his mother irrelevantly.

"Haud yer tongue, woman," said Mr. Tweedie testily. "Is that a way to talk?"

But she clung femininely to her point. ". . . Taking the poor lassie out of her own bed at this time of night! It's a black shame. I never liket these nursing homes wi' their brass plates and fal-lals and starched aprons. She'd have done fine at home."

In the end, protesting, Mrs. Tweedie suffered herself to be led away. Malcolm walked round to St. George's Road with them. At the door of the boarding house, his father solemnly shook his hand.

"Keep your mind easy, son," he said kindly. "The wee lass'll win through. She's a game one, is Gracie."

When Malcolm got back, Miss Mackenzie had already retired. Her grey hair pulled down smooth and tied in an absurd bun at the back, she put her head through the bedroom door and spoke to him in a hollow voice.

"There's cocoa in the dining room, Malcolm, and the pan's on the stove."

Very leisurely he brewed the cocoa and drank it before the sinking gas fire. On the crowded events of the evening he speculated vaguely as on the

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impersonal events of a stage play. Gracie in agony—that thought stabbed at his heart; but now, tired, he could accept the inevitability of her ordeal. There could in this life be no kicking against the pricks. Pain was a necessary part of the muddled business we call life—and, as if to prove the point, there rose to his ears the hacking noise of the bronchial cough in the flat below.

He went about the task of undressing in a state of negative dullness. It was all difficult, all sordid, even if a new and innocent and lovely child was to come into the world that night. Malcolm could not think of the child. It was of Gracie he thought and of the sordid beastliness of childbirth. But what *could* he do?

In the early hours of the morning he fell asleep.

### IV

It was light when he wakened again. The rumble of early buses along Lupus Street reached his dazed mind. But why should he waken here in the dining room? There was some good reason. He groped for concentration, and it came slowly. Through his muddled processes pierced the clamour of the front door bell. Gracie . . .

He jumped from the sofa, seized an overcoat from the rack in the hall, and fumbled with the bolts of the door. The sudden flash of morning light dazed him.

"Hullo, father!" shouted a hearty voice.

Crompton. Malcolm blinked at his friend.

"Gracie?" he gasped.

"Top-hole. She's a brick, that little girl. God, what a night! But it all came away an hour ago. A boy, my son. A great, thumping nine-pounder with the lungs of a bull."

"A boy?" Malcolm repeated, while Crompton shook his hand.

"A boy, you fathead!" shouted Crompton. "A boy. Male. One of the lads. For Heaven's sake, don't stand there like a mutt and gape. I want whisky."

"My gum," said Malcolm. "That's great! Come in, Crompton."

There was whisky in the flat. Malcolm had expended the ludicrous sum of twelve-and-six on a bottle for the entertainment of his father. Crompton poured himself a peg, while Malcolm, his fingers shaking searched the mantelpiece for cigarettes and matches.

"Here's how," sighed Crompton, "and luck to the urchin!"

"Cheerio!" answered Malcolm mechanically. "And Gracie's all right?"

"First rate. Played out, of course, but she got through it like a little man. And, my hat, it was a brute of a presentation. Do you know . . ."

Crompton poured out a rigmarole of technicalities, but Malcolm was not listening. Gracie was

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well; Gracie had survived. And now there was lying in a room not far away a queer, helpless little bundle that he could call his son. His son—good God! It was incredible. He felt the tears come to his eyes. His son, his son, his son. A foolish little thing to be looked after and cherished. Malcolm seemed to see a new and difficult career opening out before him. He stared blankly at the windows opposite. The sense of Crompton's talking reached his ears again.

"You can go up and see her at ten, if you like. I'll give you five minutes. And no other visitors, my son, not for a week yet. Five minutes."

When Crompton was gone, there was Miss Mackenzie to deal with. She was out in the hall in a dressing gown when Malcolm closed the door behind his friend.

"A boy!" repeated Miss Mackenzie. "Isn't that nice?"

Last night there had been on the house and over Miss Mackenzie the shadow of tragedy. Now she could say it was nice that Gracie had borne a son, as if Gracie had taken a diploma in needlework!

But Malcolm admitted to himself that the world had changed overnight. It was a good world now, bright and uncomplicated. He consciously enjoyed the brisk sunshine of early spring as he hurried up the street to the nursing home.

They received him indifferently. A healthy visitor was of little account in that quietly bustling

house. He was shown into a room, the table of which bore the depressing relics of the staff breakfast. Apparently he was then forgotten. Ten minutes passed before a nurse appeared round the door and spoke distantly.

"Mr. Tweedie? This way. You can have two minutes."

There was a smell of disinfectants on the stair. He had to wait on the landing while the nurse entered a room. He heard Gracie's voice, faint and slow. The nurse emerged and whispered.

"Two minutes. Go quietly."

Then he was bending over Gracie. It faintly surprised him to find her unchanged. She lay rigid, to be sure, and her face was blotched red and white. Her eyes were heavy; her brow glistened with perspiration. But it was the same Gracie—and he had felt that she must be changed utterly. Her lips seemed unresponsive to his kiss.

"I've been terribly sick," she whispered.

"Yes, dear. The chloroform."

He found that he had nothing valuable to say to her. It was very awkward. He could only gaze on her weary face and smile with what he knew to be a sort of fatuous benevolence. Somebody passed behind him, and he looked round. There stared at him out of a pink, amorphous face, the steady, sightless eyes of a newborn infant. The hair of it was damp. The nurse that held this object appeared to be laughing at the inexperienced father.

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"Good Lord!" said Malcolm.

He felt that something paternal was demanded of him, and he inserted into the palm of the midget hand his little finger. The hand took hold with remarkable firmness. It was decorated with tiny finger nails, amazingly, laughably perfect.

"There's a fine baby!" said the nurse professionally.

"He looks all right," the father admitted.

Malcolm turned to Gracie. She smiled feebly.

"It wasn't worth it, Malcolm," she whispered. "It's too hard."

"Yes, dear, but you mustn't worry now. Go to sleep, dear. I'll come back soon."

He stooped and kissed her, and she hardly opened her tired eyes to acknowledge the caress. It was left to him to find his way out of the home alone. It had, somehow, been a disappointing encounter.

By the evening, however, his proud imagination had transformed the incident into a glorious adventure. He had had to tell them at the laboratory, and they had smacked him on the back very heartily. There was an adjournment at noon to a public house, where they had drinks all round. Several drinks: and Malcolm had enlarged on the unique qualities of his offspring—nine solid pounds. As the result of these celebrations, the hand of Malcolm was not to be trusted with delicate apparatus, and he had the sense to leave early. From the same source he derived the courage to purchase in Victoria



Street on his way home a bottle of Ruby Port, price four shillings. His father and mother would be waiting for his story, and it seemed to Malcolm that there was a health to drink.

He was able to give to his mother an optimistic report on Gracie and the child. Mrs. Tweedie wept happily.

"I'll no' rest till I see the bairn," she declared again and again. "The wee man!"

Pressed as to the colour of the child's hair, if there was any, Malcolm was less satisfactory to the ladies.

"Your brother Jock had a fine head of black hair on him when he was born," observed Mr. Tweedie at this point.

"He had not, Tam. That was Malcolm himself."

"No, Nance. I'll take leave to contradick you. It was Jock."

"But I'm telling you it wasn't. Jock had hardly a hair on his head."

"No, Nance. Ye'll allow me . . ."

It threatened to develop into a wrangle over this trivial point of fond and ancient history, but Malcolm was able to laugh them out of their stubbornness. He produced his bottle of port and bade them drink a health. Mr. Tweedie made the appropriate remarks and solemnly presented to Malcolm a golden sovereign for the child.

"That's for his bank," he said, "the wee man's bank. I've kep' it for years and years."

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"Oh, isn't that nice, now!" cried Miss Mackenzie, beaming.

Then they argued for a time over the name the babe should bear. It was for Mr. Tweedie, at least, a very solemn question. He repeated an impressive catalogue of names that had been borne in his family for generations.

"You and yer Uncle Colin!" said Mrs. Tweedie brusquely. "Give the bairn a name he'll no' be ashamed of."

"I was juist mentioning it," said Mr. Tweedie mildly.

Miss Mackenzie was all for striking away from tradition. Cyril, she thought, was a very nice name. Or Eric. But the point lost urgency as the evening passed.

"I'll no rest till I see the bairn," said Mrs. Tweedie, again wistfully.

In due course she saw him and emerged from the home with a wet, happy face. Mr. Tweedie was gravely happy.

"Man, Malcolm, but yon's a great wee boy," he said.

They had seen the grandchild, and they went home. Miss Mackenzie followed them three days later, and there came into the flat in Charlwood Street, Gracie and her child and a nurse attendant. It was a different Gracie, he saw at once, a woman whose eyes were rapt on the enigmatic and distinctly ugly face of John Crompton Tweedie. She

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would not suffer the nurse to carry the infant over the threshold of his father's house.

And it was different for Malcolm thereafter. A shadow of jealousy invaded his mind as he sat alone in the dining room that afternoon while they ministered to the baby in the bedroom. He had his moment of prophetic clarity. It was, he realised, the last of a phase in their lives. Now they must be home-keeping folks: an end had been put to the possibility of free adventure. And the child would grow, and there would be money to earn for his keep and schooling, and the burden would always be there. There might be another child.

Vague and bleak were Malcolm's thoughts while he sat there and the dusk came down on London. But a thin, pitiful wail came from the room next door, and something moved in him to answer its appeal with generosity. He knew that he would give much of himself for the child.

## CHAPTER XII

### I

A CHILD in the house is not a thing that can be overlooked or put away like a wedding present or an unfortunate purchase. Its demands are insistent, and the economy of a household must conform to the infantile necessity. For Gracie it was a joy to obey the autocracy of John Crompton Tweedie. It became plain that a good deal of herself was given to the service of the infant. But for Malcolm, less intimately bound up with the welfare of the child, the intrusion of the latter remained for a long time a matter of deep and muddled concern. The baby kept intruding on his habitual preoccupations.

It was not merely that the baby cried occasionally, a peculiarly heart-rending sort of wail; nor that the household was wakened by cries of hunger in the early morning; nor yet that between Malcolm and the dining-room fire there frequently stood a clothes horse hung with the baby's little bits of clothing. The incidence of these things, indeed, was rather gratifying to Malcolm and gave him an oddly pleasant sensation of cosiness and comrade-

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ship with his wife, the mother. On the whole it was good to have a son, however unresponsive in early infancy: sometimes it seemed a miraculous possession. What irked Malcolm were the fees charged by an industrial civilisation for the privileges of paternity.

The bills came in. That was the trouble. No amount of sentimental evasion could dispose of those liabilities of which the cold statements gathered in his drawer. He mustered strength one Saturday afternoon to take them out and make an addition. It was a devastating experience.

There was the nursing home, for instance. Twenty-one pounds in bare fees. Then there were extras. "Accouchement fee," a preposterous charge—two guineas. Fires, talc powder, phone calls, drugs, a roll of dressing—eight pounds in these unforeseen trifles. There was one item which infuriated Malcolm. Seven shillings and sixpence had been charged for attendance on the baby at circumcision. He had not been consulted regarding this operation. It had been done—then they told him. One of Crompton's fads. Malcolm could admit the justice of the main charges, but he cherished in his mind a peculiar resentment against that fee. And the nursing home demanded about thirty pounds in all.

Then there was the doctor—fifteen guineas and no explanation. That was one doctor only.

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Crompton's bill was still to come. Malcolm wondered if Crompton would send in a bill. It did not seem to matter for he saw himself already a potential bankrupt. He knew that some thirty-five pounds remained in the Savings Bank. And the trained nurse had got three guineas a week for four weeks. The cot, the baby's bedclothes, the pram—still to be paid for!

It could not be done. Sucking hard at a cigarette, Malcolm almost admitted the bald fact to himself. He had been brought up in a simple home where the idea of debt was horrible, and these economic shadows hung over him heavily. All he earned went to the upkeep of the little household. No saving now, what with Certified Grade A milk for the baby and a charwoman to do the scrubbing for which Gracie had neither the time nor the strength. Dolefully he stared at the gas fire and muttered in his depression.

"Good Lord!" he whispered to himself.

With Gracie that night he went into the sombre details of their indebtedness. It had been his intention to be very businesslike, to draw up a balance sheet on paper, calmly and systematically to face their problem. They began very well to be sure, adding up the long list of bills outstanding and placing the total against their modest resources. The deficit was alarming, a thing that could not be explained away. Malcolm sucked his pencil and frowned at the paper.

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"My gum!" he said, "but it's a pretty blue look-out. It's not as if we can save anything week by week."

"No," agreed Gracie too readily, "and there's a whole lot of things to buy for the baby. Woollies and that. Oh, and there's that account for the bath and the stool."

That was what exasperated Malcolm—that prospect of endless buying before him in his capacity as a father. It seemed to him that he should have been warned. Gracie spoke of the prospective expenses as if they had already been discussed between them, and it was maddening that she should take them for granted.

"I wish to goodness, Gracie," he said, "that you'd make up your mind what you do need and help me to get these accounts square. It drives me mad when you suddenly remember something new."

"But how can I know, Malcolm?" she pleaded.

"You seem to know perfectly well. You've managed to remember to-night about the bath and the stool and the woollies and what-not. It's the first I've heard of it."

He spoke harshly and she lowered her head, flushing, above the piece of sewing in her lap. Her very humility was irritating.

"We simply can't go on like this," he insisted bitterly. "One thing after another!"

He saw a tear drop from her eye on to the back of her hand, but the spectacle did not mollify



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him. As if crying made it better! They were in a proper mess; crying was no good at all.

The jangle of the door bell cut through the uncomfortable silence. Crushing the scrap of paper in his fist and throwing it fiercely against the glowing bars of the gas fire, Malcolm stalked from the room. The flap of the letter box had clattered, and something rustled to the waxcloth of the hall.

"Another bloody bill, I suppose," he growled. There were two envelopes. One enclosed a polite note from a gentleman in New Bond Street who, with an irony he could not have consciously devised, offered Malcolm any sum from five pounds to five thousand at the shortest notice: no transactions with minors entertained. The other—a handsome affair of deckle-edged violet paper—was for Gracie. It was addressed in a dashing hand and bore a North London postmark.

"It's from Miss Bunt," said Gracie at once.

She read the epistle slowly, while Malcolm itched to hear its message.

"We can't go, that's all," said Gracie at last.

"Can't go where? Let's see."

Miss Bunt congratulated Gracie on her restoration to health. She expressed the hope that she, Miss Bunt, would shortly have the opportunity of seeing the darling baby. In the meantime she wondered if Gracie and Malcolm could come up for tea and supper next Sunday. And wasn't it

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*wonderful* that Jock had been selected to play centre-forward for Scotland in the forthcoming International?

"Why can't we go?" asked Malcolm truculently.

"You know very well why we can't go." Gracie's spirit of resistance was rising against his boorishness.

"I don't. I suppose you've just made up your mind not to go."

"Malcolm!" she cried piteously, "I wish you wouldn't speak like that. It's not fair. You know very well that we can't leave baby."

That he did know and had known from the first. He realised the existence in himself that evening of a black devil of cantankerousness. He knew that he was working off on her his general grievance against the difficulties of existence. He mumbled over the letter of Miss Bunt.

"Well, I hope you'll at least ask them down one afternoon. It's going to be a fine business if we're never going to have any fun again because of the baby."

That thought stuck in his mind as he brooded over the fire: the ubiquitous power of the baby in the house. Lord, but the prospect was bleak! Because they were poor, a great part of their lives, the best part, must be sacrificed to that thankless service. It did not seem to Malcolm that he would ever enjoy freedom of circumstance, even of thought, again. It was as if in procreating the

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species he had surrendered the integrity of his immortal soul to the obscure and probably meaningless purpose of providence.

His dull resentment was only natural. He was exasperated all the more by the fact that his consciousness of the emptiness of life must affect the relations between man and wife. It was damnable to have to go to bed with a woman to whom he could not speak, lest a harshness or a cruelty escape his lips. He nearly wept when the baby, roused by Gracie to receive the appropriate sanitary attentions, wailed in his helpless irritation.

### II

Miss Bunt, clumsily escorted by Jock, came for tea on the following Friday. Gracie had duly written a polite invitation, which was promptly and effusively accepted. And at once it was plain that Miss Bunt had come to Pimlico charged with high excitement.

It had been in Gracie's mind that John Crompton Tweedie would be the centre of attention that afternoon. She had dreamed a little in her simple pride of displaying the healthy points of that unique infant to another of her own sex. That Miss Bunt was a spinster, perhaps sixteen years older than herself, lent a flavour of sharpness to her anticipation of the encounter. At once she led her guests to where the child slept in his cot in the bedroom.

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It was not Miss Bunt, but Jock, who was excited by the spectacle. Miss Bunt exclaimed rapturously, but the mother could catch in her tone an echo of insincerity. It was not the authentic note of the baby worshipper. But Jock was sincere. He beamed over the child.

"That's a rare wee fella!" he exclaimed honestly. "Fancy the old Professor . . ."

Cautiously he put out a huge hand to touch the soft, limp fingers of the baby. It ran up the puny arm and lingered on the bicep.

"Feel the muscle of the wee beggar!" cried Jock enthusiastic. "There's a lad for ye! My gum, Gracie, ye'll see me teaching him to kick a ball soon. Has he got a ball yet? I'll get him a ball."

Gracie's heart warmed to Jock. She had always liked Jock. But she saw that Miss Bunt was not amused. And Miss Bunt spoke archly.

"And now we've got a bit of news for you!"

They moved into the dining room.

"News for me!" cried Gracie. She looked from the complacent face of Miss Bunt to the sheepish grin on Jock's face. "You're engaged? You're going to get married?"

"That's it," agreed Miss Bunt, "but you could have guessed, couldn't you?"

"Oh, yes, we guessed," said Gracie. "And how nice!"

Nice. Miss Mackenzie's favourite epithet, now meaningless. Gracie could not feel that the match

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was ideal. Jock might have chosen a girl of his own age. But Jock had had no choice. Nevertheless, he was set up for life—a man of fame, the subject of enormous transfer fees, betrothed to the daughter of a prosperous publican. Jock would become a prosperous publican and would never know what it is to be burdened by a load of debt.

Gracie fell silent, thoughtful, but she listened with part of her mind to Miss Bunt's chatter. It was all of the wedding. They were to be married within six weeks.

"Of course, there's the International on Saturday," Miss Bunt explained. "Once that's over . . ."

It dawned on Gracie that she and Malcolm would be expected to give a present. The Bunts would look for something handsome. Oh, it was all so difficult! She shrank before the thought of breaking the news to Malcolm. He would become violent and abuse her. Violence had grown on him lamentably since the baby arrived.

She heard Miss Bunt's pulsating voice, very polite.

"Well, we must run now, Gracie. No, really! It's awfully good of you, but the fact is"—she giggled—"we're going to buy the ring."

"Well, I mustn't keep you from that," said Gracie tolerantly.

She was glad to see them go. She wanted to be with her own sombre thoughts. Then she found that she could not bear to think. It wasn't

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the debt; it was Malcolm. He would be so angry. She felt that their love was cracking under the strain, that married life had changed into a sort of contest. She was very miserable, and she cried a little in her chair in the darkened room.

Even the baby could not distract her. John Crompton Tweedie was washed and fed in the early evening, and she loved to handle the tiny soft body and allay its appetites. Now, however, she nearly cried over his helplessness, so pathetic in a house darkened by debt and unfriendliness. No security for her little baby. In a passion of tenderness she crushed him to her breast and rocked him fiercely.

"Sweetheart! Sweetheart!" she cried over him. "I wish we were all happy again! Oh, your mummie wishes we were all happy again."

On that subject the baby had nothing to say. He began to whimper, and she hastened to feed him. Slowly he sucked himself into a drowse. She laid him back in the cot and with swimming eyes doted on him. It was the first time that his father had not been there to see him tucked away. Why must everything go wrong like this? Heavy at heart, she stooped to kiss the child, flicked his tiny quilt into position with expert fingers, and switched out the light. Listlessly she began to set the table for supper.

The door bell rang. At once she thought of Malcolm, of bad news of Malcolm. Her hand at

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her throat, she hesitated before running to answer the summons.

"Oh, it's you!" she gasped at the sight of Crompton, enormous on the step.

"Did you think it was a ghost, Gracie? May I come in? I want to see that young husband of yours and pat his back. He's one of the lads, isn't he?"

"How? What do you mean?"

"Haven't you seen? Good Lord, woman, your young man's famous. Look here . . ."

He drew from the pocket of his heavy coat a battered copy of *The Times* and handed it to her with a finger on a bold headline. Standing by the table, she could hardly read for excitement. It seemed such an ominous document, this long letter which filled a column of the leader page and bore the signature of F. W. Gandy.

She did not understand very clearly, but it was plain enough that the letter conveyed an important announcement. "Results of far-reaching significance in the realm of physiology." . . . "Now definitely beyond the experimental stage," . . . "as announced at a recent meeting of the Royal Society." . . . "It is well that the public should understand both the possibilities and the limitations of the result so far achieved."

Her eyes skimmed this pompous stuff and concentrated on the last brief paragraph.

"I feel it my duty to add that this result could



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never have been achieved but for the skill and patience with which my assistant, Dr. Malcolm Tweedie, has conducted an elaborate and anxious series of experiments."

She felt her head swimming. Her heart was in her throat. It was too much. Malcolm—her own Malcolm! She heard herself blubbing.

"Oh, isn't that wonderful! Oh, I'm so happy!"

Through her tears she looked up into Crompton's kind, jolly face. He was smiling sympathetically. She wept afresh and simultaneously.

"Amn't I a silly!" she cried.

"My dear Gracie, you're nothing of the sort. You're the properly proud young wife of a brilliant scientist. That's what I came for—to slap the young rip on the back. And here he comes, by God!"

The front door had slammed. They listened quietly while Malcolm hung up his hat and coat. He was humming a little tune.

"Sounds pleased," whispered Crompton.

Malcolm entered the room jauntily. There was a smile in his eyes.

"Hullo, young people," he said briskly. "Is supper ready?"

Crompton leaped forward and seized him.

"Come on, young man! Come off it! None of your blinking modesty. Come on, Gracie, kiss the little beggar while I pat his head. All together now . . ."

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He broke into a robust version of "The Conquering Hero." Malcolm struggled in his mighty embrace and emerged with his tie and hair awry. They were all very happy.

"You'll stay for supper, Dr. Crompton?" asked Gracie.

"You bet I will. I've something to say to this young man. I wish we had a bottle of bubbly."

"There's some port left," said Malcolm eagerly.

"You'll both do very nicely with tea just now," said Gracie.

She departed happily for the kitchen, and the men settled down with cigarettes to wait.

"And now, young fellow?" Crompton began.

"And now—what?" asked Malcolm.

"You know what. You've done your job at Gandy's and made a bit of a name. What about turning to an honest piece of work?"

"You're at it again, are you, Crompton? I thought we had settled all that."

"Had we? And what about young Master Tweedie next door and his clothes and his schooling and all that? My dear old boy, you know as well as I do that you can't do it."

"You leave that to me."

Malcolm's tone was curt, but the entrance of Gracie with a tray cut short the discussion. She kept coming and going until the meal was served, and it was so pleasant, in the reflected glory of

the day, to sit at bread with his wife and his friend that Malcolm got rid entirely of the grudge that Crompton's insistence had put into his mind. There was uproar at the table, with Crompton very jovial and amusing. Gracie loved the boyishness of the men.

"Come along, Tweedie!" cried Crompton in the end. "Out with the syrup you call port. I think a little toast is indicated."

The glasses were charged, and Crompton rose to his feet, laying his burning cigarette across the edge of his plate.

"Ladies and gentlemen—" he began formally. Then he looked down at Gracie, his spectacles gleaming, and spoke to her directly. "I say, Gracie, what is the toast? I'm blowed if I drink to further successes at St. Olave's. I want to drink to the young blighter as a G. P., but he's ticked me off once already."

"Well, don't try it again."

Malcolm spoke abruptly. Crompton faltered and glanced at Gracie, who was looking reproachfully at Malcolm.

"Oh, don't be an ass, young Tweedie," he attempted to carry off the situation. "You're going to chuck all this research rot, aren't you? Isn't he, Gracie?"

Before she could answer, the cold voice of Malcolm cut in.

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"I wish you would mind your own business, both of you."

Abruptly Crompton sat down. No toast had been proposed; no toast had been drunk. Malcolm's irritability had spoiled the evening. He spoke heavily to Crompton.

"Drink up and have another port." And he passed the bottle.

"I'd better not," said Crompton quietly. "I've a lot of work to do yet. In fact, I must buzz off now."

He went away. There was nothing else to do. "Don't worry," he whispered to Gracie and, shaking hands with Malcolm at the door, he spoke almost tenderly.

"You're a silly old ass, you know. Perhaps you'll change your mind."

"I won't change my mind."

"Well, don't forget me if you do."

Malcolm went back reluctantly to the dining room and threw himself into a chair. He stared at the fire, just because he knew that the eyes of Gracie were steadily upon him. He heard her speak firmly.

"You had no business to talk to Dr. Crompton like that."

"Like what?" he retorted foolishly. "I'll talk to him as I want."

"You will not, Malcolm, if I can help it. He's the best friend you ever had or ever will have, and

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he's the kindest soul in the world, and he's offered you a big chance—and all you can do is to be rude. I'm ashamed of you, Malcolm."

"I suppose you're dying for me to bury myself in a practice?" he sneered. "As if I weren't doing well enough where I am! I suppose that's nothing to you."

He threw the copy of *The Times* on the floor at her feet.

"It's a great deal to me, Malcolm," he heard her say. "So much, that you break my heart when you go and spoil it. And that has nothing to do with the question. I'm not going to sit here and listen to you being rude to our best friend. I'm ashamed of you."

Silence. He was ashamed of himself. And Gracie had kept her dignity. She had remained mistress of the situation. Therefore he remained silent, finding a curious satisfaction in the peculiarly boorish quality of his silence, as if it were a form of deliberate insult. But she ignored it and went on clearing away the dishes. Shortly she disappeared with the tray to wash up in the kitchen.

Half an hour passed before she returned. He was still sitting back in the chair and frowning at the gas fire. She ignored his deliberate pose of enmity and spoke casually.

"Jock was here to-day with Miss Bunt."

"Was he?" Malcolm was not interested.

"They're being married next month."

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"God help them!"

She took her work bag from where it hung over the antique bell pull and spread a piece of knitting on her lap. Deliberately she drew back her head to study its quality and effect; deliberately she uttered her next remark.

"We'll have to get them a present."

He did not answer. She glanced at him and saw that his pose had not altered. At last the deliberation of his antagonism goaded her into sharpness.

"You don't seem to realise," she said, "that that will cost us another five pounds."

His reaction appalled her with its swiftness and violence. Down came his feet with a bang, and the fire irons clattered noisily on the tiles of the hearth. He stood up, and his left hand gripped the mantelpiece till the knuckles showed white. His eyes blazed at her insanely.

"God in heaven!" he cried. "Am I ever to get out of this cursed mess? Money, money, money! There's never anything else but that. You and Crompton and Jock—till I'm nearly off my head. Oh, damnation, I'm finished with all this mucking about! I'm going out to drown myself."

Melodrama. He knew it himself at the back of his mind; and she knew it. Still she cried on him to stay, and he stamped from the room, slamming the door behind him. She rose and ran after him; the front door banged in her face. Moaning, she went back to the dining room and threw herself on

her knees before a chair and in the soiled cushion of it she buried her face.

She wept. "Malcolm! Malcolm! Come back to me! Come back to me! I'm sorry, dear. I'm ever so sorry." But he was beyond the reach of her appeal.

The gas fire failed and died. Near midnight the electric light went out with a click. Only the hacking cough of the child in the basement was as constant as ever.

III

Malcolm walked and walked and walked. He had no conscious destination; his only desire was to leave behind him the flat in Charlwood Street and the exasperations that had come upon him there. With that blind instinct went a need to be alone, out of compromising contact with his kind. Inevitably, then, he found himself in due course leaning over the parapet of the Embankment.

The tide was ebbing rapidly, sliding silent and horrible towards the oblivion of the sea. These dark waters suggested death, and clearly he saw himself as a potential suicide. Then he laughed softly. It was absurd, that idea. For all his troubles he had no sense of ultimate futility in his own affairs. There was a future; there was something still to be endured and enjoyed. As if impatient with his momentary submission to the mor-



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bid, he turned his back on the river. Facing him there were the bleak windows of a pumping station. He saw a great wheel turning slowly within that cold and empty house, he saw the enigmatic rise and fall of a beam. He shuddered at the sight and, turning westwards, walked rapidly along the deserted esplanade towards Chelsea.

It was a fine spring night, bland and windless, and Malcolm found as he walked away from the pumping station that his spirits had unaccountably lightened. It was as if his refusal of the idea of suicide had marked a sordid crisis that was now well behind him. Now he could think reasonably, for his passion had cooled, and it was of Gracie and the baby he thought.

He was sorry for Gracie now: that was the surprising thing. He saw in his mind's eye the charming wistfulness of her face when he had hurt her. Its appeal was too much for him, and in his reaction from anger he became maudlin, so that the tears sprang to his eyes and he saw the lights on Albert Bridge all blurred and magnified. As if to save his own face at this juncture he lit a cigarette.

That soft mood passed in its turn. The remembrance of overwhelming debt returned to him. There gathered in his throat a knot of pure physical pain, and the Embankment seemed dark and dangerous again. He was incapable of hope; it was all black and disastrous before him. He realised that he could not pay his debts: the fact

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was as ineluctable as death itself. To borrow from his parents, from his friends? It was impossible. There was in his Scots character an insurmountable barrier of pride against that facile idea, so that it merely passed through his mind in a flash and was gone. And yet something must be done. The bills lay there at home unpaid. He had a notion that pressure must be put upon him at once, and his pride could not stomach the idea. It was unbearable. Unconsciously he hurried in his walking as if his creditors were pursuing him. He smoked cigarette after cigarette till his mouth was foul with their poison.

Thus inevitably he had to face the last, desolate solution of his troubles. Crompton. There was a firm offer there. With Crompton he would make money. A word to Crompton, and his troubles would vanish. New dresses for Gracie, a clean, spacious house, a nursery for the baby! His heart jumped at the first, glad glimpse of freedom. He wanted to walk straight to the house in Kensington and, with a laugh, sign the articles of capitulation. Then a gentle melancholy came over him once more. He began to feel sorry for himself, and the tears started to his eyes again.

It would be failure, the essential failure of Malcolm Tweedie, who had dreamed so greatly, on whom so many proud and affectionate hopes had been based. The things he had wanted to do, the clean and splendid work of his mind! And he

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would have to put away his dreams and forget. There were no two ways about it. He might do it—and yet he could never quite forget. He would never cease to regret that part of his own soul he must barter away. It would be with him to the grave, his grudging consciousness of surrender. And was this what life demanded—hostages to fortune, paltry compromise? All for the sake of a girl and a foolish, ungrateful baby with a hungry mouth.

His wanderings took him past Crompton's door. There was a light in the room on the first floor, and Malcolm paused. He wanted to go in and see Crompton as his best friend, to put before him his sad and muddled case and ask his advice. He moved towards the steps, then turned away. He feared the strength of Crompton. He wanted to think.

It was long after midnight when he got back to Charlwood Street, and it seemed that Gracie was asleep. Quietly, without switching on the light, he undressed and slipped into bed beside her. She did not stir, and he let her be. It was in his mind, however, that she lay there as wide awake as he.

### IV

John Crompton Tweedie was in the habit of wakening at seven in the morning and calling for nourishment. He was a child of regular instincts,

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and when his programme was not strictly adhered to it was his custom to make a great deal of noise. It was his cries, at first peevish and then infuriated, that wakened his father from sleep.

By the time Malcolm's eyes were able to focus through the greyness of the curtained room, Gracie was already out of bed and busy with a pan at the gas fire. He heard her speak tenderly but firmly to the passionate infant.

"It's all right, sonnie. Mummie's coming. You'll get your bottle all right, darling. Don't cry."

The baby refused this reasonable comfort. Under cover of the distraction, Malcolm studied his wife at her tasks. In that blue dressing gown she looked deliciously pretty. The way her hair fell over her brow. The quick, graceful competence of her hands. Their eyes met for a moment as she moved to the cot with the bottle. Timidly he smiled at her. She smiled in return. It seemed to him a curiously mature, a definitely maternal smile, as if Gracie had grown from girl to woman in the night.

She came back to bed and lay silent, with a watchful eye on John Crompton Tweedie's handling of the bottle. Normally it lay on his chest while he sucked, but occasionally he conceived a gigantic prejudice against it and pushed it angrily away. Malcolm spoke nervously.

"Did you sleep well, Gracie?"

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"No," was her answer.

"Neither did I."

He moved a little till the warmth of her body touched his skin. Then he turned on his side to look at her profile. It was placid and alluring. Cautiously his hand went out to her shoulder. She turned towards him and smiled again.

"Gracie," he said, "I'm sorry, ever so sorry."

"Malcolm," she sighed, and closed her eyes for his kiss.

"It was rotten of me, Gracie," he went on, "but I was all on edge. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course I understand. Do you forgive me?"

"Forgive you! What for?"

"For being selfish. Oh, Malcolm, I had no right! I was thinking of myself and the baby. It was terrible. And you with your work!" The tears came into her eyes. "Malcolm—I want you to go on with your work. We'll get over—the other things somehow. You'll go on with your work, won't you?"

He could not answer save by clutching her to him and pressing his lips on that dear face now wet with quiet tears. She was wonderful. Her unselfishness was a thing he could never hope to appreciate or to repay. His wife—now he knew the lovely significance of the word. It seemed that they had come together at last to the complete, understanding, and always passionate comradeship of man and woman perfectly mated.

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Their rapture was interrupted by a wail. John Crompton Tweedie, lacking the sense of dramatic form, had lost grip on his bottle and was complaining bitterly. With a small, glad cry Gracie leaped from bed to comfort him. It was a long and intimate process. She bent low to the puckered face and for a long time murmured her doting affection over it. At last she stood up and smiled to her husband.

"I suppose we might as well get up now, old man," she said.

All that forenoon Malcolm went about the flat in a state of suppressed ecstasy. He lingered long in a dressing gown over the morning paper, and when he had read the last word of it he sat smoking and smiling, just because Gracie sang happily over her tasks in the kitchen. The worth and dearness of Gracie were vividly with him then. There could be no darkness in his mind while it was filled with the sense of their happiness. It was simply a good thing to be Gracie's husband. He sat and listened to her moving about the house. It thrilled him to hear her speak her baby talk to the boy.

She scolded him over the midday meal.

"Aren't you going out, you lazy thing, on a lovely day like this?"

"Never thought of it," he chaffed her.

"Well, you can come and push the pram."

"Can't. I've a letter to write."

Regarding that fact she did not appear to be



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in the least curious. She went out with John Crompton Tweedie into the pale spring sunshine and left him alone. Slowly he assembled pen, ink and paper. Then, reluctantly, he sat down to write.

"Dear Crompton . . ." he began.

He paused. It had not occurred to him that the decision would be made thus, with a heart that was light. Could such a grave decision be taken so casually, almost unconsciously? A wave of the old regret came over him, and he bowed his head low over the pad. The laboratory, the work, the gleam of fame—now he knew that it was not easy to forswear the dream. Deliberately he pulled his mind back to its morning mood and began to write. After the first few sentences, his pen moved swiftly.

He wrote for an hour. The stamp was just on the envelope when Gracie returned from her walk. He went to the door to help her in with the pram and she stared at him.

"Are you never out yet?"

"Just going. I've had a lot to do."

"Well, don't be late for tea," she warned him and disappeared into the bedroom with the baby.

There was a pillar box round the corner, but he walked with his letter up St. George's Road and through the quiet squares of Pimlico. He did not wish to part with it just yet; he had to cling sentimentally to the last of his young ambition.

Malcolm Tweedie did not pass through the dusk as a figure of tragedy. He smiled occasionally as



he went. But there was a lump in his throat, and he was a little dazed and sad. He thought that the squares were beautiful in the blue light of early spring evenings in London, and a singing blackbird on a tree in Warwick Square filled his heart with exquisite joy. But he was a little sad, and he bit his lip when the letter passed through the slot and rustled into the keeping of the Post.

He turned along Buckingham Palace Road towards Victoria, and a newspaper seller came running from the station, bawling. Malcolm peered at the contents bill that served him for an apron. His heart jumped.

#### TWEEDIE'S HAT TRICK

He had forgotten the International. And at least one of the family had achieved fame.

Gracie was in the kitchen when he got back home. Quietly he went up behind her and put his arms about her body.

"When will you be ready to move, old lady?" he asked her fondly.

She swung herself out of his arms and stood staring at him.

"Malcolm!" she cried. "O Malcolm, you haven't . . ."

"But I have, Gracie," he insisted softly.

Still she stood staring, but as he watched her, he saw a dim, soft look come to her eyes.

"The wee baby," she whispered.









